

lord, i worry that love is violence

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/42343926) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/42343926>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence , Major Character Death
Fandom:	Dream SMP
Relationships:	No Romantic Relationship(s) , Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit
Characters:	Phil Watson Philza , Wilbur Soot , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity , Cara CaptainPuffy , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Karl Jacobs , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Sam Awesamduke
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - A Series of Unfortunate Events Fusion , Dark Sleepy Bois Inc , Platonic Possessive Sleepy Bois Inc , Dark Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Possessive Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Character Death , Murder , Lots of Murder , Angst , there is no accidental baby acquisition , this time it's intentional , no nickel this time , Blood , Death , Attempted Kidnapping , Kidnapping , Hurt/Comfort , Evil Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot and Technoblade and TommyInnit are Siblings , Winged TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Winged Wilbur Soot , Winged Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Winged Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Amoral Characters , Non-Consensual Touching , Platonically , Animal Instincts , Unreliable Narrator , Footnotes , adults are idiots , Non-Consensual Drug Use
Language:	English
Series:	Part 5 of Something Wicked This Way Comes
Collections:	Dream SMP Classical Collections , Sad boy Tommy hours , DreamSMPFics
Stats:	Published: 2022-10-13 Updated: 2023-04-04 Words: 28,725 Chapters: 5/?

lord, i worry that love is violence

by [Flustered](#)

Summary

“I think that is Mister Karl. Our banker.”

“What is he doing here?”

“Children-!” Karl rasped out, then bent over to cough. “Children, I need to talk with you. I have very bad news for you children. Your parents have perished in a terrible fire.” He said, like he was handing out a bank statement.

The carrot dropped from Tommy’s hand. Landing onto the sand on the ground. The three boy’s faces grew pale.

The three children stared at him.

Karl paused for a few moments. Waiting for a reaction. Shifting on his feet. Then he added, “perished means killed.”

Distantly, Techno responded with a feeble voice, “we know what perished means.”

A Series of Unfortunate Events au. Except Phil is asking if anybody is going to be a dad for three orphans and doesn't wait for an answer. Okay, maybe he does kill a few people who try to respond but they don't matter.

On indefinite hiatus

Notes



i killed a plant once because i gave
it too much water. lord, i worry
that love is violence.

—José Olivarez, from “Getting Ready to Say I Love You to My Dad, It Rains,” Citizen Illegal

I tried to emulate the writing from the books, and the narration from the show. So it is a bit whimsey and almost childish at time, but then it gut punches you with a single line. I also add

in footnotes because I really liked how they added to the narration. I did in a way that didn't really break up the reading, and I hope it isn't distracting.

Special thanks to SilverWing15 for helping me with my summary and tags! Literal life saver!!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Bad Beginning Part One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

**For Kristin,
darling, dearest,
dead.**

This is not a happy story.

Perhaps you didn't see the tags. It is completely understandable, most readers ignore them anyways. But this is a story that will not end with a prince saving a princess from a dire fate. It will not have a happily ever after.

If you have picked up this fic in the hopes of an exciting story that ends with the protagonists finding a joyful end- this is not for you. In fact, it is encouraged that you close this tab. Leave and perhaps search up a fic with happier tags.

If you continue further, it will only end in misery.

...why are you still here?

It is a solemn duty to share the story of the Soot Orphans. Throughout their hardships, they faced a dangerous foe that would surely have gotten them. If they hadn't been as smart, brave, or courageous in the face of danger, they might have been snatched away by the infamous Count.

This story is only shared with you because it is important that the many sacrifices made for the Soot Children to not be forgotten. The death of many brave and formidable people who sacrifice their lives. And, of course, the children themselves deserve to have the truth out there.

Like all stories, it must start at the beginning.

Wilbur Soot, the eldest, was a unfailingly polite avian boy. Twelve years old, and incredibly brilliant. Wilbur had the knack for engineering and machines. He was an inventor. But first and foremost, he fancied himself as a musician. Just as much as he enjoyed reading blueprints, he could spend hours reading music sheets. Analyzing out each note on his guitar, before sweeping out a beautiful tune of his own creation.

Wilbur kept a yellow sweater wrapped around his waist. And when he needed to truly think, he would pull it over his head. An answer for the problem would soon appear. His mousey brown wings were not flashy like other avians, who had bright colorful feathers. If a stranger spotted Wilbur in the market, they would think he looked quite ordinary, with brown hair and eyes.

Wilbur was a kind older brother, always thinking of his younger siblings. The three of them were like peas in a pod. Perhaps they were a touch too clingy with each other. The boys preferring to sleep in Wilbur's nest instead of their own rooms. Wilbur, being the wisest and the eldest, tried to keep his younger siblings out of trouble. Of course, that never ended well. As his brothers always end up dragging him into mischief.

The three boys stood at the edge of a street. A picnic basket held in Wilbur's hand as he waved down a taxi driver. Within seconds, a cab drew to the curb and stopped, allowing Wilbur to open the back door and slide in.

"To briny beach, please." Wilbur told the taxi driver. The man behind the wheel nodded, and as soon as the boys had clasped their seat belt closed he pulled away from the street.

Wilbur leaned towards the window, a wide smile on his face as he gazed up at the dark and gloomy clouds above their heads. "What a wonderful day to go to the beach."

"It looks like it might rain," the taxi man replied.

"That is what makes it perfect." Wilbur grinned back.

Beside Wilbur, his brother shifted uneasily.

Technoblade was the middle child, and a hair past ten years old. He was a bookworm of the family. He could spend hours upon hours in the library, with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. With little effort, he could quote a book front to back without having to glance at it. He was extremely intelligent and could be considered quite the philosopher.

He was serious in everything he did. From reading, to spending time with his siblings, Technoblade always had a sense of responsibility.

"I don't like leaving mom and dad," Technoblade said, a worried look crossing his face. "I know they said they would come and pick us up at the beach but..."

"It'll be fine." Wilbur pulled Technoblade close and bumped their shoulders. "Dad said he had some paperwork to finish up. Mom won't let him stay in his office for too long. You know how he can forget stuff."

Techno's pinched expression eased. A soft smile crossing his face at the thought. "You're right." A lock of his pink hair fell into his eyes, and he brushed it away.

For a very quiet and responsible boy, Technoblade had a soft side. Always worrying about everything. It had taken Techno a long time to shuffle up to their parents and ask if he could

dye his hair. It matched the deep auburn color of his feathers. He had been so worried that people would make fun of him, but Wilbur put it to rest.

Besides, if anybody *tried* to bully Techno over his hair, Wilbur was close by with a sharp word to end the conversation.

The ride to the beach was uneventful. The taxi man grunted when they arrived, and Wilbur paid him without much fanfare. The beach was empty. Just like how the three brothers like it to be. The breeze was cool from the storming clouds high above, and the third member of their group shivered.

They did not notice the rising pillar of smoke in the distance.

Tommy Soot was the youngest. But he was just as smart as his brothers. Three years old, and rather clingy, Tommy was the baby of the group. He had pitch black wings and a rather dangerous habit of biting people who angered him. His teeth were dangerous sharp, and he wasn't afraid of getting dirty in a fight.

More than once, some idiot tried to pick Tommy up. And they would find Tommy's teeth sinking into their arm. The only people Tommy allowed to hold him was his flock. Wilbur and Techno quite enjoyed picking Tommy up and holding him as they went about their day to day business.

"There!" Tommy pointed out a spot on the beach. Techno shifted him in his arms, letting Tommy sit on his hip.

"Oh that is a lovely spot, thanks Tommy," Wilbur agreed, walking to where Tommy had pointed. The beach was empty, save for a few pieces of litter. At the end of the trip, the boys would go around and collect what they could find and throw it away.

Wilbur pulled a towel out from the basket and laid it out on the ground. The three boys settling on it, grabbing items from inside of the basket. Sandwiches made by their mother were consumed as the boys laughed and talked.

This is about as happy as this story gets. Three boys going to the beach together, and having a fun time. Perfect place to close the tab and leave to find a happier story. You should do that now. Before things turn for the worse.

The boys were talking over each other, too excited to stop and listen to the other one had to say, but still catching the others conversation between each breath. Techno and Wilbur beamed at each other, while Tommy gnawed on a carrot stick they had packed for lunch. It was a delightful day at Briny Beach, the dark clouds hanging low and threatening to open rain on top of them. But the trio of boys were having a wonderful time.

Somebody began to cough in the distance.

Tommy raised a hand, pointing off into the distance. Grunting out a single word, "who?" In this case, he really meant, "who is that strange man approaching us?" But since he is only

three years old, he has decided that talking is for pussies and opted to use short hand. His two older siblings, of course, knew exactly what he meant.

The two older boys turned, and saw a mysterious figure approaching. The wind picked up, spreading sand up in the air. Wilbur pulled Tommy into his arms, his wings opening up to cover his sibling from the dirt.

Techno stood up, staring as the man grew closer. And so did the coughing. "I think that is Mister Karl. Our banker."

And indeed it was. Dressed up in a polished suit and looking rather out of place on the beach, the man held a handkerchief up to his mouth as he hacked up a lung. Wilbur pulled Tommy up onto his hip and stood up.

"What is he doing here?"

"Children-!" Karl rasped out, then bent over to cough. "Children, I need to talk with you."

"Hello Mister Karl," Wilbur said very politely, even though Techno knew half of his mind was currently thinking about *why* their banker was at the beach with them. "How do you do?"

"How do you do?" Techno echoed, his parents teachings about being polite stuck in his head.

"How," Tommy echoed, repeating the same phrase as his brothers. With just a few less words. His little black wings flapping in the wind.

"I'm doing," Karl coughed twice more, "just fine. I don't do well on the beach."

There was an awkward pause.

"It's a nice day," Wilbur tried, looking up at the angry dark clouds.

Karl smiled at them, "it is a nice day. I have very bad news for you children. Your parents have perished in a terrible fire." He said, like he was handing out a bank statement.

The carrot dropped from Tommy's hand. Landing onto the sand on the ground. The three boy's faces grew pale.

He continued. "They perished in a fire that destroyed your entire home. I am very, very sorry to have to tell you this."

The three children stared at him.

Karl paused for a few moments. Waiting for a reaction. Shifting on his feet. Then he added, "perished means killed."

Distantly, Techno responded with a feeble voice, "we know what perished means."

There is something about losing a loved one that is indescribable. Like leaning up against a wall, trusting that it would hold your weight, only to find that it wasn't there. An empty gap, making your stomach lurch in fright as you fall. A missing puzzle piece that can never be found. A gap in a perfectly pristine picture always marred by the misplaced section.

You cannot imagine, dear readers, what the children were going through. Unless you have lost somebody in your life. The consuming grief that ate up everything else. Leaving them broken and adrift. All it takes is one moment. One fire. One trip to the beach. And they have found themselves lost and adrift from reality.

Three hours ago, they were perfectly normal, albeit smart, children. With two loving parents and a home that had everything they needed. Three hours ago is out of reach. So tantalizingly close, yet getting further away as the seconds past.

As the Soot orphans were taken to their home they found a burned husk of a building. They had left those very walls hours prior, and now they smoldered in ash. Carpets, rugs, books, walls, floors- all of it turned to ash.

Smoke was still rising off of random objects. Techno paused and stared heartbroken at his favorite chair in the library.

Firefighters murmured in the background. Strange men in their house walking on creaking floorboards. They had been silent when walking on them hours ago. But now...

“Gone,” Wilbur whispered, holding Tommy in his arms. He stared at a guitar that he had been strumming last night. Half of it was eaten away by flames. The rest was charcoal. “It’s all—”

“Gone.” Techno whispered. He picked up a soggy half burned book. It broke in half. He startled, stepping back away from it.

Mister Karl was standing in the doorway. Awkwardly brushing ash from his shoulders. “I am so sorry, children. I can perfectly imagine what you must be going through, even though I’ve never lost anybody before. I thought it would help if you came and saw what happened to your home.”

The boys were silent. Staring off at different areas of their home. The rug Tommy took his first steps on was gone. Halfway melted. The coffee table still held their father’s glasses, the glass melted onto the wood, leaving only the golden frames behind.

Wilbur picked it up, staring at it.

“But do not worry,” Karl continued, “the bankers and I at Pandora’s Vault Management are going to take care of you. You have nothing—”

“We have nothing.” Techno whispered.

“-to worry about.”

Tommy whimpered when he saw one of his toys burned into a crisp. Hiding his face in the crook of Wilbur's neck.

"Oh children," Karl sighed, "you don't have to be so dramatic. Things will get better! As the executor of your parents will, they have requested you to be placed with people they trust wholeheartedly. Tonight, you'll stay with me. And come the morning, you'll be placed in your new home."

"New..." Techno picked up a destroyed object.

"...home." Wilbur finished.

There was silence. Until Karl coughed and ran his hands down his suit. "I'm sorry children, but I am due at the bank here shortly--"

Slowly, with their heads low, the three lingered for a moment longer. And then began to shuffle towards the door. The air was cleaner outside. The flashing vehicles of firetrucks and police cars on the carefully maintained lawn. Killing the grass.

Karl's car was a small. The children squeezed themselves into the back seat.

"Say goodbye, children. You're off to a new adventure." Karl sat in the drivers seat, starting the car.

Wilbur, Techno, and Tommy all peered out the back window. Taking one last look of the burned and ruined building that had once been their home for their entire lives.

"Goodbye," Wilbur whispered painfully, a sentiment all three of them shared. And they watched their home disappear as Karl drove away.

Tommy didn't have very high hopes. Mister Karl, or the banker fucker, as Tommy thought of him, took them home to his tiny little apartment. Karl seemed a bit frazzled. It wasn't like he had a lot of time to prepare for three children to suddenly stay with him.

It didn't help that Karl's idiotic nephews were staying with him at the same time.

"It's a bee," one boy with ram horns yelled.

"It's a *wasp*." The other boy, with half black and white hair, shot back.

Tommy couldn't remember their names. Karl introduced them, but Tommy hadn't paid attention. The two boys stared at the Soot's like they were two headed animals. Tommy shied away, pressing his face into Wilbur's neck. The soft soothing scent of his brother keeping his anxiety low.

Karl muttered a bit and rushed away, the phone in the distance ringing loudly. Bank business calling him away.

The ram kid, stared up at the three Soot orphans. Tubbo, or whatever his name was, opened his mouth and asked, “how did you do it?”

Tommy could feel Wilbur and Techno stiffen.

“Do what?” Techno asked hoarsely.

“Start the fire?” Tubbo rolled his eyes, “duh.”

It was a punch to the gut. Wilbur let out a choked noise. And Technoblade fell silent. None of them could respond. Tommy peered up at Wilbur, seeing tears fill his eyes. He leaned up and gave Wilbur a hug. And then shot the idiot kid a glare.

That had been yesterday. None of the Soot children said a word after that. Leaving Karl to fumble around in the painful silence. Now-

“It’s a *bee*.” Ram asshole was growing louder.

“A wasp!”

The car was tight with just the three children in the back seat. Even with Tommy on Wilbur’s lap. Now, there were five children and one adult. The two bickering boys were in the front seat, getting louder by the second. Karl was coughing into a handkerchief, wheezing between breaths. And Tommy didn’t get a single wink of sleep the night before.

Their nest was destroyed. Everything had been. And it was painfully hard for Tommy to relax enough to doze off. The second he was drifting, his instincts would kick in. Waking him up with a jolt. Screaming that it wasn’t safe to sleep here.

Tommy knew his brothers experienced the same thing. Wilbur and Techno flinching in the middle of the night, waking each other up.

None of them mentioned the few times they cried. Silently grieving.

Their eyes were still all red rimmed when Karl came into the room and got them up from the tiny bed. Tommy felt lost. He didn’t know what to do anymore. But neither did Wilbur or Techno.

They at least had each other. And that was the important thing.

“Here is,” Karl stopped the car in front of a gray bricked building. He wheezed and cough. “This is your stop, have a good day at school Ranboo and Tubbo.”

“Thanks Uncle Karl,” Tubbo opened the car door and tumbled outside, “see you tonight. Are the orphans staying with us again?”

“No, I will be dropping them off with their guardians.”

“Awesome! They woke me up with all their crying.” Tubbo laughed, “bye!”

"-it was a wasp-" Ranboo started up again, and the door slammed shut. The two brothers* skipping off to their classes.

(*You may be wondering about what happened to the nephews of Karl. They did not leave very thrilling lives. One of them went to go live in a shack in the woods and talks to cows, the other followed their uncle's footsteps, becoming a banker. Both of them think the other had it better. Sadly, the Soot children have a much dire fate in store for them.)

Karl coughed a few times before pulling away from the curb. After a few seconds of silence, he said, "don't worry, children. You are going to be in excellent hands. Your parent's will specifically stated that you are to go to your closest living relative. Using a very large ruler, I measured out that your future guardian lived only three miles from your old home."

Wilbur and Techno looked at each other. Baffled. "Do you think he knows what 'closest living relative means?'" Techno asked.

"No no, I am quite certain." Karl nodded, pleased with himself. "A very professional looking consultant* came to my office yesterday. He was very convincing. And it makes perfect sense. Now, let me see. He was either your fourth cousin three times removed. Or your third cousin fourth times removed. Either way he was removed."

(*do not listen to consultants. Especially if you didn't hire them and they burst into your office without warning.)

Tommy scowled. This felt a bit fishy.

"Your guardian is an excellent man. I wish I was in your shoes. If only I could have an actor as a guardian." Karl nodded along, "his name is Count Philza. Since he is a an actor, you know his excitement is genuine. And I have heard simply wonderful things about him. You will not want for anything, children."

"How come we've never heard about this... Count before?" Techno shifted in his seat. "If he was only three miles away from our house, how come our parents never talked about him?"

"I can't imagine why. Perhaps he was busy. You know, I am very busy at the bank all of the time. We spoke over the phone this morning. He said very specifically he couldn't wait to get his hands on you." Karl spoke, and the car began to slow. "Here we are." He cranked the break and turned the car off. He turned to the kids, "ever since my assistant Jack disappeared off the face of the map I have so much more work to do. This will have to be a hasty drop off. I really do need to get back to the bank. Hasty means quickly."

"We know what hasty means." Techno replied.

Wilbur tentatively smiled. Tommy scowled. Karl got out of the car, and there was just a brief second where the three boys were alone.

"Who knows, maybe this could be good." Wilbur said, optimistically. But it was half hearted at best.

"Maybe." Techno said, reaching over to grab Wilbur's hand. "Let's try and be... happy." Their fingers threaded together.

"Okay," Tommy agreed, worming over to Techno and pat him on the shoulder. What he really meant was, "whatever, let's get this done and over with."

Techno opened the door and got out, holding it open as Wilbur slid out next to him. Tommy felt the fresh air. He sniffed at it daintily, there was a pleasing whiff of the blossoms blooming by the trees.

They stood in front of a modest home. Rose bushes were blooming, their flowers rich and full. A neat path winding up to the front porch.

It wasn't bad. It looked really nice. Tommy hadn't expected much. But it was surprisingly good.

"Hello, hello, hello!" There was a man standing by the white picket fence. "Oh, are you the Soot children?"

Wilbur stepped up, holding Tommy aloft. "Yes. I am Wilbur, these are my brothers Techno and Tommy. It's very nice to meet you. How do you do?"

Tommy stared, unabashedly. He was small enough. And he didn't care if it was rude. The guy was weirdly tall. With green hair and a slight reflective look in his eyes.

"Huh," Tommy spoke. That meant, "why does he look so green and weird?" Wilbur poked him, a reminder not to be so rude.

"It's so nice to meet you," the man said. "My name is Justice Sam. I'm a local judge in the supreme court." He held out a large hand, and Techno took it. Shaking it. "I'm so glad to see you three are doing well. I heard about what happened in the news. I can't imagine what you are going through. If you need anything, I have a library and a study you can use any time. As well as an ear to listen." He winked.

A small smile broke over Techno's face, his dark auburn wings fluttering happily. "We would really like that." A library was an oasis in a vast and empty desert of misinformation, a common phrase their parents told them.

This was already looking up.

"Tell me, do you children like music as well?" Sam asked, "because I don't have the knack for it. But one of my clients gifted me their entire music collection. Would you be interested in looking at it?"

A real smile lit up Wilbur's face. "Yes, actually. I quite like to look over music sheets in my spare time."

"You are more than welcome to join your brother in my library then. And what about you," Sam turned to Tommy, a kind smile on his face. "Do you like to read too?"

"Tommy likes fantasy novels. If you have them." Techno said, almost shyly. "I read them to him. While he likes to chew on carrots. His teeth are very sharp."

Sam clasped his hands together. "Excellent. I have a wonderful collection of novels he might enjoy. And I have a large patch of carrots growing in my garden that I could never eat all by myself. You are free to eat them as much as you want. I'm so glad to have met you three. I think all of you will enjoy your time here."

Wilbur relaxed as soon as Techno did. And begrudgingly, Tommy accepted it as well. Sam wasn't... half bad.

Maybe it would really be okay.

"Do you live with Count Philza?" Wilbur asked, suddenly shy.

Sam's mouth opened, and then closed. "Oh. Oh no." A pinched disgusted expression crossing his face. "No, no, no. I'm not- No. I'm sorry children, but Count Philza lives... over there." Sam pointed a finger over Wilbur's shoulder.

All three children slowly turned away from the quaint picturesque home.

The first thing Tommy noticed was the dead grass. The sidewalk was nearly covered by dirt and yellowed grass that looked like it had never been watered once in its life. It led up to a porch that looked like it was crumbling, nature reclaiming the stone steps. Creeping black ivy covered most of the bricks and windows.

It didn't help give a good first impression when the children watched a hawk snatch a bird out of the sky right in front of the building. Nor did the ominous* rainclouds behind it lit up with thunder.

(*a word that would mean threatening, menacing, or sinister. In this case, it is foreshadowing.)

"Ah," Tommy said, which meant, "this looks creepy as fuck."

"Agreed." Wilbur replied.

"It was nice to meet you," Karl said, but that was distant. The children stared at their new homes with conflicted feelings. "But I really must take the children over to their new guardian."

"Of course, I'll see the three of you later." Sam waved at them as Karl took Wilbur's and Techno's shoulders and pushed them across the street. "Maybe later you can come by?"

They didn't give the man a response. The iron gate creaked as Karl opened the rusty latch. And the boys stepped up to the dark and peeling door.

Karl pressed the doorbell. There was a shrill ring on the other side of it.

There was a long pause. And Techno shifted, "are you sure this is the right place?"

"Absolutely." Karl pressed the doorbell once more. "He told me he would be practically camping by the front door for your arrival."

Ring.

There was a thump of something heavy behind the doors hitting the ground. And then-
The door swung open quickly.

Ah, this fucker was tall. Tommy was surprised, his hold on Wilbur's sweater growing tighter. The next thing he took in was how blue the man's eyes were. So vibrant they were almost glowing. Count Philza was... strange. He had long pale blonde hair that fell to his shoulders, a silly striped hat perched on top of his head. A pale scruffy five o'clock shadow framing his sharp jaw.

"Hello," Philza's voice was buttery smooth. His lips lifting to show incredibly sharp teeth which made alarm bells start to ring in Tommy's head. "Welcome to your new home, children. Wilbur, Techno, and Theseus."

"Tommy!" Tommy's face screwed up in annoyance. The full message was, "my name is Tommy you ugly old tall fuck."

"What my brother means," Wilbur jumped in, "is that he likes to be called Tommy and not by his given name."

Count Philza's eyebrows quirked up. The grin stretching out wider. "Tommy," he hummed, as if testing the word out on his tongue. "I like it." He swept back, holding the door wide, "come in, come in."

Tommy wasn't the only one to notice that the seeming darkness behind Philza wasn't apart of the background. Techno gripped Wilbur's hand tighter in shock. Two giant black wings. Pitch black, almost like the void. If Count Philza hadn't moved, they wouldn't have known what they were.

"Go on, kids." Karl nudged them, "we need to do this hastily, remember?"

Techno pressed closer to Wilbur. And the two older boys walked in, taking in the rest of the house. It was clean. And well maintained, for the most part. There were quite a few fascinating things lining the walls. Suits of armor, rich carpets, and odd paintings that were more abstract than realistic.

Shadows were glued to the walls that no amount of light could penetrate. Thick curtains covered most of the windows. Tommy pushed his cheek into Wilbur's neck. Keeping one eye out to watch.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome." Philza closed the door, "I have been waiting for you three. And... man with a hat on."

"I'm Karl. We spoke on the phone." Karl leaned forwards, holding out a card with two fingers. "From Pandora's Vault Management."

"Where?" Philza didn't look half as cheery talking to Karl. Annoyance flashing across his face.

"I'm from the bank. It's my duty to execute their parent's will. If you have a few moments, I'd like to go over the rest of the paperwork. We need to talk about the children's trust funds along with their fortune."

Philza paused at that. Thinking. And then coolly replying, "perhaps another day. Aren't you a busy man? I'm sure you have better things to do."

Karl slowly nodded, looking a bit conflicted. "I'll ring you and set up a good time to go over the rest of the papers. Children, if you have any need, I'm a phone call away. You have my card."

"Don't worry," Philza was pushing Karl out of the house. "They won't need for anything from *you*."

And he slammed the door. The glass rattling in the panes.

Wilbur and Techno both took a step back.

"Hm," Tommy said, which meant, "oh boy. We're in for it now."

The Count whirled around, clasping his hands together. The tips of his fingers were black, Tommy noted cautiously. Not fingernail polish. But... claws. No, *talons*. "I'm so sorry for that, boys." Philza smiled, "I don't like talking business when I would rather take care of you."

Wilbur swallowed, "thank you."

Count Philza beamed. "Of course. It's my pleasure." And then he straightened up. Tommy hadn't even realized that the man had been hunching over until he loomed over them all.

Damn he was tall. Tommy clutched at Wilbur's sweater tighter. This felt... uncomfortable. Judging by the way that Wilbur shifted Tommy's weight, he felt the same.

Count Philza caught the motion. He smiled with far too many sharp teeth, holding his hands up, "I can hold your brother." A pause, "if you'd like."

Wilbur squeezed Tommy tighter, "no thank you." He said, always so polite, "Tommy doesn't like it when somebody outside of our family picks him up. He tends to bite."

Philza's face froze. And he nodded, dropping his hands. "I see. Perhaps, one day, he might let me hold him." He gazed down at the three boys, drinking in the sight of them. Tommy scoffed, and buried his nose into Wilbur's collar. As if he'd ever let some tall dipshit hold him.

After a very uncomfortable pause, Philza clapped his hands. "Right! A tour. Let me show you around your new home."

Wilbur and Techno nodded in relief, the silent staring was over. And Philza's long legs stretched as he began to walk. A flash pale skin caught Tommy's eye. The pants were just a little too short, and he caught a glimpse of a dark tattoo.

A heart. With what looked like two slitted eyes in the sides. Tommy wondered what it meant.

Despite the ragged exterior of the house, the inside of it was well kept. There were strange items littering every corner. Knickknacks that were both strange and mysterious, just like their new guardian. Dark drapes covered almost every window. Making the home feel cramped and closed up, but it was surprisingly big. Techno yawned a couple of times, hiding it behind his hand. Wilbur stifled a few in Tommy's hair.

Darkness always made them sleepy. That's why they always enjoyed keeping their windows open to the sun. Thankfully, Philza did not notice. He was always five steps ahead, opening thin and tall doors with a flourish. Letting the children peer into each room he announced, and then moving on.

Tommy counted five bathrooms, six different unused bedrooms, a rather dusty and pathetic looking library, and two fucking kitchens. Philza paused in the foyer, before the giant staircase. He waved a hand to a door that he didn't bother opening, "that is to the basement. I would ask of you don't to go in there. I keep some very sensitive and expensive objects in there for my hobby. Consider it to be my private space."

"What do you do? For your hobby." Techno asked, looking vaguely intrigued.

Philza turned, a half frozen smile on his face. He lit up, delighted that Techno asked him a question. "Sculpting." He replied, after a pause.

"Like pottery?" Wilbur replied, and Philza let out a small laugh.

"I like to call it art." Philza replied mirthfully. "Some people think it isn't. Maybe one day I'll show you."

"That would be nice." Wilbur politely smiled, and then Tommy let out a wide yawn. Blinking slowly. The fucking curtains were going to make him sleep.

"Oh," Philza's blue eyes dilated, leaving only a blue ring around his pupils. "Are you tired? I can show you to your nest."

A nest. Yes, that would be fucking awesome. A nest was better than a bed.

"If you wouldn't mind." Wilbur nodded. "We are... very tired."

"Of course. I can't imagine how tiring this all must be." Philza began to take the stairs. His large black wings trailing on the ground behind him. Tommy eyed them, wondering how the fuck this guy could take care of that many feathers. "If you ever need me, my room is at the top of the house." He pointed further up the stairs as he stopped at the first landing. "Your room is this way," and he led them down a dark corridor, to a single dark door.

"I didn't know how you liked your nests, so I left you the bedding for you to build it. I hope you don't mind." He opened the door, stopping in the middle of the entrance. The boys peered around him.

It was large. That was Tommy's first thought. It was fucking *gigantic*. He never had a nest this large. Their parents let them do what they pleased, and the boys piled their belongings into Wilbur's nest. It was only big enough for one boy to be in it, two were a squeeze. Throw in Tommy, it was a tight fit. But here it was fucking huge. They could all spread out and not touch each other once. Even if Wilbur tossed and turned and snored like an old man.

The idea of not touching his brothers rankled Tommy. And his feathers puffed up in irritation. They better not fucking use the space. Or he will lay right on top of them.

"Do you like it?" Philza asked, cutting into the boys silent compilation.

"Yes." Wilbur replied, "it's very... nice."

There were mounds of piled blankets on the side of the nest. All of them folded neatly. But every blanket was some shade of black. Tommy let out a silent snort. This guy liked the color too much. It was everywhere.

"Good," Philza hummed, pleased. And he let out a breathy croon. All three boy's heads snapped to look at him. Philza looked positively gleeful at their reaction. "Well, go have a look." And he gestured into the room.

The man still stood in the doorway. Barely enough space for the boys to squeeze past him. Wilbur hesitated. And then awkwardly stepped forward to brush past Philza.

Tommy fucking flinched when he felt a hand trail over his feathers. And he let out an angry hiss, twisting around and snapping his teeth at the retreating fingers.

"Oh, sorry," Count Philza said, not looking sorry at all. Techno stepped in quickly after Wilbur. Pressing closer to hide Tommy between the two of them.

Philza leaned casually against the doorframe. For far too long. His blue eyes taking in every breath. Every anxious flutter of wings. The smile growing the longer he stared. Lips curling wider, showing sharp white teeth that made them nervous.

Wilbur swallowed hard. "Thank you for showing us our room." He tried, still unfailingly polite. Trying to shoo the man away.

"You're welcome." Philza tilted his head, not even blinking.

"We are uh, very tired." Wilbur tried once more.

"I know."

A beat.

"What my brother means," Techno awkwardly stepped in, "is that we'd like to rest." And when Philza didn't react, he added, "privately."

"Oh," Philza didn't look hurt, but he lost some of the light cheeriness in his voice. His expression didn't fall. "I see. I'll come by in a few hours for dinner."

Wilbur let out a soft sigh of relief, and nodded, the polite smile faltering but still strong. Philza casually pulled himself from where he was leaning against the door frame. "If you need anything, nestlings, I am close by."

Then he shut the door with a quiet snick. The three boys didn't move. Still staring at the doorway. And after thirty seconds, they heard the quiet tap of shoes walking away. Philza had been waiting. Listening.

For what? Tommy didn't know. He was already sick of this house. The too dark curtains, the strange guardian, the creepy behavior-

He wanted to go home.

But home was less than twenty four ago ago, and growing distant as the seconds continued to callously go by. And he can never return there.

Chapter End Notes

Total deaths: two

The Bad Beginning Part Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Jack, can you bring me the Soot file, please?”

One and a half days prior*

(*There had been dozens of comments asking how on earth the Soot Children ended in the unfortunate care of Count Philza. The scene you see here is called a “flash back.” It means, “taken place during the events in the last chapter, shortly after the Soot fire and before Karl met with the children on the beach.” It is now presented to you so those commenters will stop requesting information.)

A man hunched behind his desk, furiously whispering into his phone’s receiver, “Niki, you need to be on guard. Keep an eye on the boys, the crow is circling them.”

A voice crackled over the phone, “I will. Jack, you need to ensure they go to the right guardian. Quackity will be able to explain everything to them, you just need to-”

Niki’s voice cut off and the phone began to beep. An automated message played. “*I’m sorry, it looks like your call has been disconnected. Please try again later.*”

Jack reached over and tapped on the phone’s cradle and pressed his finger rapidly on the button to reset the call. The curly wire connecting to the phone in the way, and he brushed it to the side as the clunky plastic clicked together.

“Jack, can you bring me the Soot file, please?” Karl’s voice crackled from the intercom on Jack’s desk. It was ignored.

“Operator?” Jack reset the line again, but nothing happened. Static filled the receiver.
“Hello?”

A shadow stretched across the marble floors, reaching like a clawed hand towards a toy. Jack stiffened, and sat straight. The plastic receiver was slammed into its cradle, as Jack watched the man stalk into the entrance of the bank.

His gate was smooth as his shoes clicked against the marble stone of the lobby. A fedora perched on top of his head, blonde hair tucked up into it. A cane tapped on the stone. He wore a suit, with a fancy scarf wrapped high around his neck.

The man might be in disguise, but the air around him was undistinguishable. Like an animal on the verge of snapping.

The Count could never hide the cold icy blue eyes as he stared down at Jack.

“Can I help you,” Jack asked blandly, as the well dressed man stopped in front of the desk.

“I need to speak to the banker in charge of the,” the Count glanced down at his palm at a smudge of ink, “Soot children.”

Jack stood up, his hackles rising. “I’m afraid you need an appointment to speak with him.”

“Jack, can you bring me the Soot file, please?” Karl’s voice came from the intercom. The two men glanced at it before their stare down began again.

“I do have one.” The Count replied.

“Oh?” Jack narrowed his eyes. “And what is your name, sir?”

The Count’s eyes flicked down at the open calendar on the desk, and Jack slapped a hand over the text. But it was too late.

“Appointment.” The Count replied quickly.

Jack folded his arms, arching an eyebrow, “your name is Appointment?”

“Sure...ly. Surely Appointment.” The Counts voice took on a sudden thick English accent, “it’s a family name.”

“Jack, can you bring me the Soot file, please?”

“I’m afraid I’m going to ask you to leave.” Jack picked up the Soot folder, tucking it under his arm protectively.

The Count’s expression changed, concern painted falsely on his face. But his eyes remained the same. Cold and full of anger. “Oh my, I saw a terrible thing happen outside. The guard that works at this bank was stabbed and left in an alleyway outside. If somebody doesn’t go stop him from bleeding out right now he might die!”

Jack glanced around, and sure enough, Antfrost wasn’t here yet for his shift. The guard was missing from his post. “What did you do to him?”

“I didn’t do it,” the Count replied, faintly shocked, “I saw a ruggedly handsome man do it. Tell me, does your phone work? You should call an ambulance.”

The intercom crackled. “Jack, can you bring me the Soot file, please?”

Jack was frozen. The Count leaned forwards, and plucked the folder from Jack’s hands. Waving it idly in the air, “best run quick,” he said sweetly, like poison, “he was losing quite a bit of blood.”

“You’re a bastard,” Jack hissed but he was moving already. Bolting out of the door, leaving the Count behind. The weight of the cold eyes following him out the door.

The door to Karl's office opened, and an oddly dressed man came through the door. Karl didn't glance up from his paper work, only leaning over to buzz the intercom every minute to ask for the file.

"Hello, Banker Man," Karl glanced up as a folder was waved at him. He took it, seemingly surprised to find some stranger in his office.

"You are not Jack." Karl replied, and then held up his handkerchief to cough into it.

"Oh, your... servant went to go do an errand. But he said I could come in," the man waved at his outfit. "Let me introduce myself. As you can tell, from my fancy hat and my posh clothes, I am a man to be trusted. For I am a very talented and sought after consultant."

"I didn't hire a consultant." Karl seemed even more confused. "I didn't catch your name, what was it again?"

"It is," the man paused, "Surely. Surely Appointment. But that isn't important, what is vital for you to know, Banker Man—"

"It's Karl," Karl held his hand out to Surely. The consultant hesitated before quickly taking the hand, shaking it once, before quickly letting go.

"As I was saying," Surely wiped his palm on his very fancy lapel, "is that you're about to make a dire mistake, Karl."

"Me?" Karl's eyebrows shot up. "I assure you, Mister Appointment, that I am extremely good at my job."

"I understand that you are the Soot's executioner." Surely studied his nails distractedly.

"It's executor."

"I've heard it both ways," Surely replied, "you are the person who controls where those poor little orphans go."

Karl flipped open the file, nodding along. "Oh yes, Mister Appointment. I am in charge of the children and their enormous fortune. It says here, quite clearly, in their parent's will that they are supposed to go to their closest living relative, a world renown scientist—"

"That's where you are wrong, Banker Man."

"It's Karl."

"It's one thing to listen to science, *Karl*. But it is another thing when it's coming from a *consultant*. Which one do you think has the cold hard facts? It isn't science, I'll tell you that. They make up so many words in science. Like Mitochondria*."

(*the powerhouse of the cell.)

“Dear god, I’ve never heard of that term before. I think you’re right.” Karl gasped out.

Surely nodded along, “exactly. Science isn’t based in facts and evidence. They just throw things at the wall and hope it sticks. It’s all fictional. No, my good sir, you should look at the key phrase. ‘Closest living relatives’ can mean only one thing.” Surely paused, and Karl looked at him dumbly. “It means, ‘whoever lives closest.*’”

(*once again, do not listen to consultants. Especially if they burst into your office without a prior appointment and no credentials. Even real consultants would not recommend this.)

“My god, that makes so much sense. I will have to find a map,” Karl stood up, but Surely immediately pulled one out of his pocket. Flipping open the paper, and in one move, swiped everything off the desk and placed the map down on the table. Karl looked like he was going to say something, but Surely jabbed a finger at a spot on the map.

“Right here. They should go to their third times removed fourth cousin. An infamous and handsome actor, Count Philza.”

Karl looked thoughtful for a long moment. Tapping a finger against his lip, before coughing into his sleeve. “I’ve never heard of Count... whatever his name is.”

“It’s Philza. He’s been mentioned favorably in several theatrical reviews in small magazines. And he is the closest. I swear, or my name isn’t whatever I told you.” Surely said quickly.

“Hmmm.” Karl didn’t look like he was sold. “You know, I have the perfect tool.” He leaned down, and from a drawer in the desk, pulled out a large ruler. “We shall see if he is truly the closest living relative. Down to the very inch!”

Surely smiled, his teeth looking rather sharp. “Oh, I assure you. Any relatives that might be between us are not *living*.”

The three of them heard the footsteps fade away. Leaving them finally alone since the beach.

Techno let out a long sigh. “Well that’s fuckin’ creepy.”

“Techno!” Wilbur admonished, then nodded along. “Yeah.”

“I liked Sam,” Techno muttered, “this place is just so... weird.” He went over to the massive pile of bedding and picked up a blanket. Rubbing at the material with a critical eye.

“Sam is very nice. And a good neighbor. He did say we can visit. If it gets too much maybe we can just walk over and use his library.” Wilbur set Tommy down onto the edge of the nest.

“I don’t like him.” Techno confessed, “Count Philza. He’s just. Weird. And he stares too much.”

“Mom and Dad,” Wilbur choked up slightly at their names, “they put us here. They wouldn’t leave us with some stranger. It’s what they wanted.” And he helped Techno pull a blanket open and drape it across the nest.

Tommy wrinkled his nose. The smell from the blanket was... bleh. It wasn't musty, per say. It smelled like iron and feathers. Like the rest of the house. Wilbur and Techno made the same face.

"Interesting... fabric softener he has." Wilbur said, which meant, "this fucking stinks," but he was too polite to say it out loud.

Tommy was not polite. And he made the remark instead.

Techno snorted, "yeah. It's weird like the rest of this place."

"We can get used to it." Wilbur spoke up, trying to be positive. "Who knows, maybe Philza is just really awkward. And maybe he's just trying too hard." He shrugged, fluffing up a pillow.

"Weirdo," Tommy grumbled. But he joined in. The trio built their nest in silence. The occasional yawn breaking the silence, until they made a small little area that was perfect for just the three of them. It didn't cover half of the nest, but none of them didn't seem like they wanted to spread out.

Tommy curled up right between Techno and Wilbur. Their familiar scents soothing him. The three of them pressing tightly to each other. As if they were still in that tiny little nest in their home. If Tommy closed his eyes, he could just pretend everything was okay again.

He drifted off. Feeling the warmth of two bodies next to him. Wilbur began to softly snore. And Techno shifted around a few times. Tommy grumbled a few times, but this was the normal sounds he had grown up with.

What *wasn't* normal was the deep reverberating croon. Tommy woke up with a scared chirp, his brother's jolting awake right next to him. Tommy saw a dark figure standing at the edge of the nest, just *feet* away.

Of course Tommy let out a terrified peep. Causing Wilbur and Techno to press closer and hide him under their feathers. "What-?" Techno blinked the fogginess out of his eyes.

"Sorry to scare you," who the *fuck* - oh yeah, the creep, Philza. His voice was breathy and halfway a croon. "I came to get you for dinner."

Wilbur sat up, running a hand through his messy hair. They were all off kilter. They hadn't heard the door open. It was unnerving. "Right. We'll be right down."

"I don't want you to get lost." Philza stood still. Unmoving.

It was the *worst*. Tommy was finally pulled from behind his brother's wings, and he saw why Wilbur and Techno were so unsettled.

Philza's wings were half way open. Covering the already dimly lit room into further darkness. Curling around the nest as if to cover them. The wide, almost besotted grin on Philza's face. The thin ring of blue around his pointed cat-like pupils.

It wasn't safe, Tommy's instincts rang. And a shiver went down his spine. His wings pressed up tightly against his back. He pressed his face into Wilbur's chest in an attempt to hide.

"Aww," Philza's head cocked to the side, and he let out a soft coo. "Is somebody still sleepy? Don't worry. You can come back to your nest after dinner. You three need to eat."

"Thank you," Wilbur rasped out, pulling Tommy closer as he finally climbed out of the nest. Leaning far, far away from the strange man. Techno followed behind him.

Philza walked from weirdo territory to downright creep in a matter of moments. Tommy had never felt the urge to hide before, and now he wanted to crawl under Techno's wings and never come out.

"This way," Philza hummed, his feathers rustling like dry bones as his wings closed. And he led the way. The brothers followed him cautiously.

The air smelled good. The aroma of garlic and spices made Tommy's stomach grumble. But they didn't expect the literal feast that awaited them. Plates and plates of food was stacked onto a wide table.

This was more food than they could eat in a week. "Sit down," Phil waved towards three chairs, "I found a high chair for your brother."

It was right next to Philza's larger seat. And Tommy clung to Wilbur tightly. Ain't no way he would *ever* be separated. Especially to be so close next to that guy. Wilbur's grip grew tighter as well. "I'm sorry, Tommy doesn't like high chairs." A bold faced lie. Tommy didn't care but they were better than the fucking giant ass chairs everybody could fit in.

"Oh," Philza hesitated, "I see."

"It's fine. He can sit on my lap." Wilbur replied with a forced polite smile now.

"I suppose. Just for tonight." Philza let it slide, and Tommy let out a small sigh of relief. "Still, the food is getting cold. Sit down and dig in. I have to admit, I didn't know what you'd like. So I made a bit of everything."

That was an understatement. The two older boys sat down in the chairs, and Phil dragged the high chair out of the way with one hand. There was nothing between him and Wilbur now.

Wilbur shifted, Tommy gazing around the impressive display of food. There was... so much meat.

Did he not know that they were vegetarians?

Surely, he should know. Being their guardian. Avain's were notoriously picky about being vegetarians. It was the one thing that everybody knew about the hybrid race. Techno and Wilbur glanced at each other over Tommy's head.

"Tell me about yourselves," Philza said, picking up a glinting fork and spearing a thick piece of ham. Pulling it onto his plate.

Wilbur began to make idle conversation. Still unfailingly polite. Keeping his answers mostly to the minimum.

There were a few items that were edible for them. Techno picked up a bowl of roasted asparagus and spooned out a portion for both him and Wilbur. "Try the roast," Philza said, with a smile curled on his lips. "I think you'll like it."

Techno hesitated. And Wilbur kicked at him. "Sure." Wilbur smiled, and then shot Techno a look.

Tommy's nose turned up as Techno put the smallest little piece of roast on Wilbur's plate in front of him. Bleh. Techno did the same to his own plate. And Philza seemed otherwise satisfied.

He didn't notice or remark how both of them did not touch the meat at all. Keeping themselves occupied with bites of potato or vegetable. Wilbur cut up small bits of food for Tommy, letting his brother eat off his plate.

"What do you think of the roast?" Philza asked, and Wilbur hesitated.

"Oh, uh." He wavered, "I haven't tried it yet." And he paused, then speared the bit of meat with a fork. Without any further hesitation, he shoved it into his mouth.

Tommy and Techno grimaced. And Wilbur chewed, nodding. Holding one hand over his mouth to hide the pained expression, and the other gave a thumbs up to Philza. Wilbur glanced, panicked at Techno.

"What's that painting mean?" Techno pointed away from Wilbur at a weird looking piece of art.

"Oh?" Philza turned, and Wilbur quietly spat into his hand. Philza turned back, and Wilbur closed his fist and leaned on it. As if he was interested in hearing too.

Tommy covered his face with his palms to hide his smile.

Philza began to explain the meaning and history of the painting, and the two boys pretended to be intrigued by it. Tommy snickered, even as Wilbur quietly hid the piece of chewed up meat in his napkin.

It was... a bit lighter after that. Techno and Wilbur occasionally bumping shoulders. Hidden messages in looks and double meanings in words. Philza didn't look like he was aware of what was happening. That pleased look still in his eyes, his lips pulled back in a wide smile. Showing off those sharp incisors.

The boys were pleasantly full. Even if there was an awful amount of meat, there was enough vegetables to keep them satisfied. Finally, Wilbur asked, "can we help clean up?" Because that is what they always did after a meal. They were... house guests for the foreseeable future.

Philza beamed proudly, "it's fine. I will take care of *everything*."

The morning after they arrived at Count Philza's home, the three boys awoke to the sun shining through their open curtains.

Tommy grumbled, burying his face into Techno's stomach, trying to hide from the light. But it was no use. He was awake. And so were his two brothers. Wilbur pulled Tommy out of bed and helped him into his clothes, all the while Tommy grumbled and muttered. He wasn't a morning bird, pun intended. But Techno and Wilbur were.

"Why don't we go visit Sam today?" Wilbur asked, "he did say we were free to come over. And I think I see lights on in his window." He looked out the bay window, peering across the dead yard and across the street.

"You really think he'd like us coming over?" Techno asked, a little unsure. "People say it out of politeness, not because they really want our company."

"Well," Wilbur said, pulling the sheets on their nest to make them neat, "it's either that, or we spend the whole day in this house."

"Let's go to Sam's," Techno agreed. "He did say he had a library."

"Carrots," Tommy murmured, agreeing.

"To Sam home it is." Wilbur smiled, and then pulled Tommy into his arms. Tommy mumbled some more, but ultimately pushed his face into the crook of Wilbur's neck. The house was dark, even in the bright morning. If they hadn't left their curtains open, more than likely they would've slept in late.

Tommy didn't like this place very much. The shadows were too thick. And it smelled weird. But it was, admittedly, a better home than with Karl. Although Count Philza was particularly odd as well.

The three of them went down the stairs to the main door, and Wilbur pulled on the latch. It held firm. They paused, staring at it for a moment. "It's locked." Wilbur said, a little befuddled. There wasn't a latch or anything to turn the deadbolt. The thick oak door only had a key hold and the door handle.

"And *where* do you three think you're going?" A voice came from above their heads, and the boys looked up.

Walking down the stairs, wearing a fancy robe, was Philza. His hat was gone, leaving his long blonde hair to rest against his shoulders. His black feathers were askew. He looked like he had just rolled out of bed. The bottom of his robe slid against the stairs as he walked.

"We were going to go visit Sam." Wilbur shifted, "he invited us over when we met yesterday."

Philza's eyebrow arched, "Sam?" Still coming closer.

"The neighbor? He's the white house across the street. He came and said hello." Wilbur spoke, "he was very nice and said we could use his library."

"Oh, the *neighbor*." Philza sounded dismissive. Still pacing forwards until he was looming over the three of them.

"We didn't want to bother you," Techno added, almost shyly. "It is very early."

Philza let out a sigh that ended with a soft smile. "You three could never bother me. I want you to know that. Any time, and I mean any time, you have a problem and need me, don't hesitate. I'm your..." he paused, "*guardian*. And I very much want to take care of you all."

"That is," Wilbur fumbled for a moment, "very kind of you, sir."

The smile fell, "please, call me Phil. Philza, if you must. But I don't want formalities between us."

"Oh, thank you. Um, Philza." Wilbur shifted uneasily. "Could we go to Sam's, please?"

Philza tilted his head to the side, exposing a dangling emerald earring attached to his ear. Tommy's eyes caught on the flash and sparkle of the jewel. "Hm," Philza thought, then glanced at a grandfather clock sitting at the corner. "It's eight right now. Be home before eleven. And next time, ask me before leaving the house. Okay?"

"Thank you," Wilbur nodded, "we will do that."

Philza smiled, looking so incredibly fond. Before he reached a hand into his robe and pulled out a key. "I tend to keep the doors and windows locked. The neighbor hood is... bad. And I want to keep you safe."

"That makes sense," Wilbur shuffled to the side, and Philza pressed in close. Curling a large wing around them as he fit the key in the lock. Tommy shivered, pressing closer to Wilbur. Techno did the same.

"What time did I say to be back by?" Philza asked mildly as he opened the door. A small cold breeze slipping in.

"Eleven." Techno replied.

"*Before* eleven," Philza corrected, and then stepped to the side. Barely giving any room for them to brush past again. "I'll see you all soon, and if you aren't back by the time I said, I'll come looking for you."

"Okay." Wilbur agreed. And moved forwards to leave. Tommy was fucking prepared this time. Tucking his wings close to his back and staring at Philza with a scowl. Daring him to try and touch him again.

The smile grew wider. Philza looked charmed by Tommy's ire. He didn't reach out. Instead, letting the three of them get uncomfortably close as they passed him.

Tommy wiggled in Wilbur's arms. Peering over his shoulder as they traveled down the sidewalk. Philza leaned up against the doorframe. Watching them with his sharp eyes. He caught Tommy's gaze and smiled, waving his fingers at him.

Tommy scowled, hiding his face against Wilbur's neck. But keeping one eye behind them. Techno and Wilbur paused at the road, looking both ways dutifully, before crossing over to the white picket fenced home.

Philza watched. The entire time. As they walked up to the neatly painted door and knocked on it. Even as Sam opened the door and happily exclaimed their names, Philza stared. His eyes were locked on them until they were ushered through the doorway.

Tommy shivered, his feathers bristling. Techno had been right, the guy was a creep.

Jack's hands were sticky from pressing them against Ant's side. Trying to stem the flow of blood. But it had been too late. The man had been laying there for too long, face pale and blood spreading out on the concrete like an ink stain.

He had tried to help. Calling for somebody to get an ambulance, but he had watched as Ant shudder out his last breath. His eyes freezing as they stared off into the distance. His work shirt plastered to his side, thick with spilled blood.

It hadn't been a single stab wound. But multiple.

It hadn't been enough. Jack couldn't save him.

His hands shook as the shock settled in. But he had a job to do. And he clung to it. Tightly. Keeping him focused. He stumbled down the road until he found a payphone. His fingers left red fingerprints as he tapped in the number.

It rang twice, before he heard the voice of his friend. "Nikki," Jack croaked, "I was too late. We were too late. The crow is here."

"What happened?" Nikki asked, alarmed. "Did he get the children?"

"I don't know. He... He stabbed Ant. Left him to bleed out and I had to try and," his voice wavered and suddenly his throat closed up. "I failed."

There was a pause on the other side of the phone. "We need to protect the children." Nikki said, finally. "I'm near Quackity, I'll inform him. I'll be in town in a few days. Keep them away from the crow."

There was another pause.

"Jack? Are you there? Can you hear me? Has the line died again?"

The phone swung on its listlessly cord.

“Jack? Jack?” The voice continued to ask, as a hand reached down and picked up the receiver. “Are you there Jack?”

“I’m afraid,” a low voice answered, “that Jack will be unavailable. Do try harder next time.”

Sharp black talons clicking against the plastic as it set it back into its cradle. Cutting the call off with a *click*.

This is not a happy story.

Chapter End Notes

Total deaths: three

The Bad Beginning Part Three

Chapter Notes

thx awof

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sam's house was just as nice and pleasant as the exterior was. With wide bay windows with curtains that barely blocked the light, letting in a stream of sunbeams that lined the carpet in the library.

It wasn't as nice as their family's library, before the fire, but there were books lining the walls and very comfortable chairs that Techno could just sink into. There was hundreds of books to be read. And some of them were unfamiliar. Hidden mysteries and knowledge to be obtained. Tommy watched as Techno scanned the room with cautious eyes.

It was, to say the least, the place was the closest thing they found to a refuge so far. But looks can be deceiving.

Sam set down a clunky red metal box on a wide table, a fond smile on his lips. Gently brushing off a thick crust of dust from the lid of the toolbox.

"Here you go Wilbur," Sam spoke, "you said you had an eye for inventing things. I found some of my old tools for you to use."

Tommy watched from a thick and comfortable chair. Wilbur leaned forwards, like a moth to a flame. Curiously gazing at the box.

"I have a pile of recyclables you can go through. Broken junk I never threw out yet because I figured I could get use out of it one day." Sam said, almost abashed, "instead it just got bigger. If you'd like, it's all in my unused office just down the hall. Perhaps you'll get more use of it than letting it rot in my house."

"I would love to take a look at it." Wilbur spoke, pulling out one of the metal drawers. His fingers curling around a wrench, pulling it up into the light to inspect it. "These are very well taken care of. Do you also like to create or fix things?"

Sam positively beamed, "yes. Its one of my favorite hobbies. I haven't much time for it, recently, what with the law and all. But I was the leader of the mechanics club in college. I met some of my best friends there. My good friend Ponk, he's the chief of the police nowadays, still calls me up to talk about modifying his car. Some of the things he's added to it is crazy."

Wilbur and Sam chatted a bit more, but Tommy stopped paying them attention. Instead, he watched Techno. His brother slowly circling the room as he inspected the books. Like a shrewd man at a pawn shop, eying the wares up for anything of value.

There must've been something good, because slowly a selection of books were tucked under Techno's arm.

When Wilbur left to go peruse through Sam's junk pile, Techno finally spoke up. "Are these books sorted by topic?"

Sam turned to Techno, a bright smile on his face. "Yes. I find it so much easier to keep track of subjects rather than by name. Is there a particular category you have in mind?"

"What do you have?" Techno asked curiously.

"I have everything from French cuisine to the thousands of species of snakes." Sam reached out and touched a bound book. "Did you know there are snakes everywhere but in five locations on the planet?"

Techno tucked a lock of hair behind his ear, "Antarctica, Iceland, Ireland, Greenland, and New Zealand."

"Very good, Techno!" Sam looked thrilled. "I had heard you three were brilliant. But it's marvelous to see it in action. Tell me, what is your favorite book, Techno?"

"Art of War." A slight brush of pink heated Techno's cheeks. He was never one for attention. Tommy watched, silently, judging the interaction.

"Oh that's a great one." Sam said, moving down the line of books, before plucking a brown leather novel from a shelf. Then offering it to Techno. "Here, I think you'll find much joy with it than keeping it on my shelf."

Techno didn't move. "Are you sure?"

"Of course." Sam said, a fond smile on his face. "After every horrible thing you've gone through, you deserve a piece of home back. And perhaps," he said, almost shyly, "you'll come to think of the library to be one."

Techno hesitated, but finally he accepted the slim book. Staring down that the title, his thumb rubbing against the embossed letters. Before he gave a soft smile, "thank you."

"You're welcome!" Sam reached out to pat Techno but stopped himself. Curling his fingers into a tight fist before withdrawing it. "Sorry, I want to give you as much space as you want. I'm a very touchy person. I apologize."

"It's fine." Techno muttered as he turned to a chair. His auburn wing flicking out and brushed it against Sam's arm lightly. It was the best Techno could offer in return for a missing piece of home.

Sam looked happy. And he turned to Tommy, “I hope you didn’t think I had forgotten about you, Tommy.” And he reached inside of a pocket and pulled out a large carrot. “Harvest from my garden. I hope I remembered correctly that this is your favorite food?” And he held it out.

Hell yeah! Food.

Tommy practically snatched the carrot from Sam’s fingers. Giving it an inspection. It was still slightly damp from the dirt being washed off. But it was whole with no discoloration on it. Tommy bit into it. The sweetness of the carrot marking it homegrown, just like Sam said. And not from the grocery store.

“Yummy,” Tommy spoke with his mouth full. A crumb of carrot escaping his lips, dropping onto the chair. Sam didn’t pissed off by the mess. Instead, he smiled. He did that a lot. Like he was genuinely happy to see three poor orphans in his library.

Tommy snapped the carrot between his sharp teeth. Eyeing Sam over with caution. What kind of plans did this fucker have? Did he want something from them? It felt like everybody did these days.

Tommy scanned the room again. Wilbur was over at the table, a toaster dismantled before him, tinkering with the parts. Techno had his head bent over an open book, pink hair hiding his face.

The taste of carrot on Tommy’s tongue made him suddenly aware that this... this really did feel like home. Just a week ago, Wilbur and Techno were doing the very same exact things in their parent’s library. Tommy eating crunchy foods nearby, watching them work. A week ago was impossibly far away. Three days ago was the same.

The library wasn’t the same. Neither was the tools that Wilbur used. Or the pages that Techno flipped through. But... they were all here together. And they found a sanctuary. Where maybe, if they closed their eyes, they could pretend they were home again. And everything was fine.

“May I tell you a secret, Tommy?” Sam said, breaking into Tommy’s thoughts. The boy looked up at Sam, who knelt down by the chair. Tommy didn’t say a word, but Sam continued. “I haven’t felt so happy in years. I have been quite lonely in this house, and seeing the three of you here reminds me of an old dream I had. Of course, life never works out the way you want it to. I had spent a long time working to become the man I am today, that I forgot the things I strove towards for. I’ve always wanted a family, Tommy. And I hope,” Sam looked vulnerable, his eyes growing damp, “that maybe you three might choose me one day. I don’t want to push, not so quickly after the tragedy that happened in your family, but... maybe in a year. Or two. I could... adopt you?”

Tommy took in the words silently. As he did so, he looked at Wilbur’s focused expression as he used a screwdriver on a metal plate, and Techno’s curled up form wrapped around a book, and maybe... just maybe. He could see it.

Tommy looked up at Sam and nodded.

The clock ticked on. Finally, ten minutes to eleven, Wilbur looked up from the table. Parts of multiple devices were spread out. Techno was quietly consuming a book, unaware of the time. Tommy curled up beside him, dozing off. Sam himself was also in a chair, a thick book about laws on his lap.

“We should go now,” Wilbur muttered, breaking the silence. Setting a tool down on the table.

“Is it that time already?” Techno blinked his dry eyes, and Tommy yawned next to him.

Wilbur was putting the tools back into the box. Trying to clean up the mess he made. “Yeah, we have to head out soon. Thank you for letting us come over, Sam.”

“I should be thanking you,” Sam beamed, “I haven’t had such delightful company in a long time. What were you making, Wilbur?” He stood up and looked at the half built item on the table.

“A lantern.” Wilbur spoke, “it’s a bit dark in our room. I figured I could build something that’ll make it brighter when we needed it. It isn’t done yet.”

“When would you like to come back and finish it?” Sam asked.

Wilbur paused, and glanced at his brothers. Techno placing a stray feather into the book he was reading to mark his place. Tommy leaning into Techno’s side, his hair mussed. They both looked relaxed.

“Could we come by tomorrow again? If you’re not busy.” Wilbur asked hesitantly.

“Of course! I would love it. I usually work in the evenings. I’m free any morning.” Sam replied, and Wilbur ducked his head to hide a smile.

“Thank you for letting us come over.” Wilbur repeated, and Techno finally stood up, Tommy in his arms.

“We’re almost late,” Techno muttered, looking at the clock ticking onwards. Wilbur tried to clean up his mess faster. Sweeping a handful of screws into his palm.

“You can leave it out,” Sam waved him off, “you’ll just be back tomorrow. I don’t mind it.”

Wilbur nodded, “thank you.” And Techno pulled him away from the table and out the door. Guiding them to the front of the house.

“See you tomorrow,” Sam called out, as Techno pushed the front door open.

“Bye!” Tommy called out, waving a hand at Sam. The three cross the street to the looming house with the dead lawn. The gate creaked open as Wilbur opened it. And the three boys stepped up the crumbling sidewalk.

The door was unlocked as Wilbur turned the knob. The house was dark as they remembered it. Dark thick curtains hanging over every window. Shadows covered everything. Nearly

blinding the three of them as they crossed from bright sunlight into the gloom. Tommy grumbled unhappily, pressing his face against Techno's shoulder.

"Give me a few more hours and I'll get the lantern working," Wilbur ruffled Tommy's hair, "it won't be so dark after that."

"Where's Philza?" Techno asked quietly, scanning the dark foyer. It was just the three of them. No sign of their strange and bizarre guardian.

"I'm not sure," Wilbur shifted on his feet uneasily, "and I don't want to look for him." A sentiment all three of them shared.

"Why don't we look at his library," Techno offered up, "I think I remember where it was from the tour."

"Brilliant as always," Wilbur remarked, leaning over and ruffling Techno's hair as well. Techno scowled, but didn't move away.

"Bitch," Tommy muttered, which meant exactly what it was supposed to. Wilbur laughed, filling the empty house with the sound.

"It's this way," Techno said, turning down one of the many corridors. Tommy kept glancing up at the shadows. Almost daring for anything to pop out of them. But nothing did. And Techno opened a door, revealing a much smaller room inside. It wasn't anything like Sam's library. Where there was wall to wall books of varying degree. Instead, there was a single bookshelf. Books were laid on it haphazardly. A few spines were clearly damaged from neglect.

Still, books were books. Techno would gladly read anything he could get his hands on. Wilbur could see him already mentally going through the titles, judging their contents.

Tommy was transferred to Wilbur's arms. And they went to go sit on a large black couch. Tommy grumbling in Wilbur's grasp, but he didn't move. Even as Wilbur put him down, and wandered over to the thick curtains blocking the windows. Drawing them open to let in the morning sunlight filter through the dirty windows.

"Is Philza a doctor?" Techno suddenly asked, as Wilbur stared out the window. He glanced over to his brother.

"What?"

"There are a lot of books about anatomy." Techno lifted up a medical textbook. There was a drawing of the human skeleton on the front.

"I don't know." Wilbur mused, "I mean, he goes by Count Philza. Not Doctor."

"Huh," Techno mumbled, setting the book down and peering at a new one. "Strange."

Finally Wilbur drifted away from the window. Sitting down next to Tommy, curling one of his wings around his brother. Tommy leaned back into the limb, lifting his own black wings

to press into Wilbur's.

"Need a preen, Tom?" Wilbur teased, and Tommy grumbled, shooting Wilbur a '*who the fuck do you think I am*' look.

Wilbur hummed leaning to the side and pulled Tommy into his lap. His younger brother burying his face into Wilbur's shirt. Flaring his wings out for Wilbur's touch.

Wilbur let out a small laugh, squeezing Tommy tight for a moment. Just long enough for Tommy to squirm before releasing him.

"Wilbur," Tommy let out a petulant whine, looking up at Wilbur with a pout. Flaring his wings open again with a squirm when Wilbur had yet to touch them.

Wilbur reached up and played with Tommy's fringe with a teasing smile. It was getting a little bit long. "Tada, all done Tommy. Your hair is back to normal."

Tommy's bottom lip wobbled, giving Wilbur a betrayed look.

"Aw, don't be like that. I'm just having a little bit of fun." Wilbur laughed, and Tommy squirmed, trying to turn away towards Techno.

Techno was hiding a smile behind a book, holding it up high to cover his amusement. Wilbur caught Tommy before he moved too far, pinning him in a tight hug. "Come on, Tommy." Wilbur laughed, "you know I'm just pulling your leg."

Tommy sniffled, before shooting Wilbur an angry look. "Mean!" He slapped Wilbur's hands. "Cruel!"

"I know, I'm sorry," Wilbur finally moved one of his arms. Reaching down and dragging his fingers through Tommy's down.

Immediately Tommy sagged into his grip. Letting out a tiny chirp. Wilbur tweaked a few out of place feathers with a smile as Tommy melted further into his hold.

It had been a stressful few days. And none of them had preened each other during it. Tommy's wings were a mess. Later tonight, Wilbur and Techno will have to sort out each others. They were old enough to deal with the slight discomfort for a little longer. But Tommy didn't deserve to wait as long.

Techno sat down next to Wilbur, book in hand. But he didn't open it yet. Instead, taking Tommy's other tiny wing and began to thread his fingers through the quills. With the two of them working on them, it didn't take long before they were clean. Tommy clinging tightly to Wilbur, making soft peeps and chirps. His eyes closed.

Wilbur was running his fingers idly through Tommy's fluffy down when Techno shifted, grabbing at Wilbur's wing and began to pick through his feathers. Wilbur shuddered, before leaning up against Techno. Letting him pull at his wing further. There was a handful of feathers that were bothering Wilbur, no doubt to the stress of the past few days-

A soft deep croon made all three of them freeze. Wilbur's feathers puffed out in alarm before his wing snapped closed over Tommy. Covering him completely from view. Techno luckily let go of Wilbur's feathers before they were pulled out.

Leaning up against the doorframe was Philza. Wearing a loose white button up shirt, the sleeves rolled up his long forearms. A lock of blonde hair fell into his face. But his eyes, Wilbur shuddered, his eyes were so *dark*. Looking at them like he wanted something from them. Like he was desperate-

"I'm sorry," Philza rasped out, "I didn't mean to interrupt. Please, by all means, *continue*."

No. It felt wrong. Like wet sand drying on their feathers. Itching terribly. Just the idea of having somebody *watch* them while they preened was just... so wrong. How long had Philza been standing there for? How long did he see them get comfortable?

"We're done." Wilbur whispered, but the words carried over the distance just fine. He could practically *feel* the weight of Philza's eyes as they scanned him and Techno. Picking apart their messy and crooked feathers.

"I see," Philza pushed himself off of the doorframe. Stepping further into the room. Making alarm bells go off in Wilbur's head. He held his breath. Watching timidly as Philza glided in. His steps smooth like a cat.

Wilbur noted there was a stain on Philza's white shirt. The color of dirty copper on the edge of a sleeve. Perhaps he had been working on his pottery? But he didn't ask. Didn't dare speak up.

The three of them watched, like deer standing before a speeding car, as Philza stepped up to the window. He gazed out of it for a moment, before gasping the thick curtains and pulling them firmly closed. Darkness covering the room once more.

"You may have your windows open in your room, however, I would like to keep the rest of the house dark." Philza spoke softly, but with an edge of steel.

"Okay." Wilbur agreed, then shrank away when Philza turned around. There was something about the man that made him on edge.

"Sadly, light tends to give me a headache after a while. I'm sure I have a lamp in every room if you'd like to use. Although," he reached out towards a small desk lamp that sat on a side table. He pulled on the switch, and the lamp only gave a small click. Philza gave a small huff of laughter. "It seems like the bulbs might have burned out a while ago. I'll get some more when I go to the store."

There was a pause. But Wilbur had no clue what to say. Count Philza didn't seemed bother by the silence. Just staring at them. Pinning them down with his attention. It looked like his eyes could glow somehow in the dark. The only pinprick of light in the gloom.

Techno grabbed Wilbur's sleeve and pulled on it. Wilbur let Techno guide him to his feet. "I can't read in the dark," Techno declared, matter of factly, "let's go to the nest."

It was a life saver. Wilbur clung to the excuse like a man lost at sea with a piece of driftwood. Edging away and following Techno out of the dimly lit library. Tommy clung tightly to him. And Wilbur couldn't get the feeling like he was a dog with his tail between his legs, running away from the awkward silence. But he was glad he could get out of there. It felt like a glue trap. Sticky, and meant to hold him in place while Philza picked Wilbur apart with just his eyes.

Techno's fingers caught Wilbur's, sliding them into place in a firm grip. The familiar weight of his brother's hand in his made Wilbur feel better. "I have your back," Techno muttered. "No matter what."

"Thank you," Wilbur said with utter relief. Stepping quicker, so they strode side by side. Bumping his shoulder into Techno. "I don't know what I'd do without you, Tech."

"Suffer probably," Techno replied blandly, and Wilbur snorted.

"Probably," he agreed.

The next few days followed a similar routine. The three of them would wake up and head over to Sam's house early in the morning and return before eleven. Then they would spent most of their time in the nest, where the curtains were drawn open. Occasionally, Philza would come to their door. With odd words or requests for them to accompany him for a meal.

Despite them living there for the past couple of days, Tommy couldn't get used to the man. It felt like Count Philza lurked in every dark corner. Ready to slide out with a perfectly timed word or croon. Once, the man had spotted Tommy standing by himself and looked like he wanted to *pick* Tommy up. What a fucking wrong'un.

Tommy didn't like him. Techno didn't either. But Wilbur put up with Philza's sleazy actions.

Techno opted to avoid him. Turning around whenever he spotted Philza. Occasionally pulling Wilbur out from an uncomfortable conversation. Wilbur was just too polite to say goodbye and leave. Techno was blunt, sometimes even rude when addressing their new guardian. Philza didn't look upset by it. Instead, an amused smile graced his lips. As if Techno's attitude was a joke.

Tommy didn't buy it. The fucker was up to something. Philza was always around the corner, as if he was trying to catch the kids in some crime. It made Tommy feel on edge. Count Philza wanted something. And sooner or later, he'd do something about it. Tommy didn't like it. Waiting every moment like he was right on the edge of a rollercoaster, just seconds before a stomach twisting drop. But the drop never came. Leaving him in paralyzing anticipation.

On their fourth night in the house, Wilbur took Techno's hand after yet another painful stilted dinner. Tommy was shifted to hug Techno's hip as he carried him back up to their nest. Wilbur pulling them along with a friendly smile.

“Come on,” Wilbur whispered, egging Techno to move faster.

“What’s with the hurry?” Techno grumbled, but he complied.

Wilbur gave him a secretive smile. “I have something waiting,” he murmured, so the walls wouldn’t overhear.

Tommy craned his neck to try and peek ahead. He wanted to know. What was Wilbur up to?

Their nest was just how they left it. Blankets were smoothed out after sleep, pillows in a haphazard circle, and the faint scent of themselves on the bedding. But there was a new pile of untouched and freshly laundered blankets at the foot of the nest. Along with a ball of twine.

“Set Tommy down,” Wilbur closed their bedroom door, “let’s build a tent.”

Techno let out a laugh, before setting Tommy down in the middle of the nest. And he pulled out one of the new blankets, pressing the fabric to his face. “Still weird,” he muttered, before tossing it back onto the bed. “What kind of soap does he use in his washing machine?”

“I dunno,” Wilbur shrugged, grabbing the twine and unraveling it. “Come on, help me tie this to the other side of the bed.”

Techno took the other side of the twine, and tied it around one of the top of the bed post. Wilbur did the same on the other side. A taught string crossing the nest. Tommy watched as Wilbur pulled at the blanket that Techno dropped. With a grin, Wilbur tossed the blanket over the top of the twine. It draped over it and on top of Tommy.

“Hey!” Tommy pushed at the heavy thick fabric.

“Techno did you hear that? It sounded like a little bird.” Wilbur teased from the other side of the blanket.

“I did. It was squeakin’.” Techno replied, mirthful.

“Bitch!” Tommy pouted, and finally the blanket was pulled up from on top of him. Wilbur peering down with a teasing grin.

“Look, I think I found him. A little itty bitty chick.” Wilbur reached in and poked at Tommy’s cheeks. Tommy’s cheeks puffed up in a scowl, before he halfheartedly snapped his teeth at Wilbur’s finger.

“Oh, he’s a feisty one.” Wilbur snickered.

Techno scoffed, “careful Wil, Tommy might take your finger if you get too close to his gremlin teeth.”

“Aww, but he’s so cute!” Wilbur poked at Tommy again, and Tommy slapped his hand away with a pout.

“Not cute,” Tommy hotly disagreed, which actually meant, “I’m a big fucking man.”

Techno and Wilbur snickered, before grabbing one side of the fabric. The middle of the blanket was resting on top of the twine, and each boy tucked the edges of the blanket under an assortment of books that Techno had slowly brought in the past few days. Leaving the fabric taught and a crude triangle tent was formed.

The sun was low on the horizon. Leaving the room already getting dark, shadows starting to grow as the light faded away. Wilbur and Techno crawled under the blanket. The space was a little bit tight, but it held the three of them comfortably. Tommy leaned up against Wilbur’s legs. Even as his brother leaned up and stuck his hand under one of the pillows.

“I put this here earlier… here it is.” Wilbur pulled out a square metal contraption. Exposed wires were tucked into corners, leaving an exposed bulb in the middle. “I finished my lantern,” he flicked on a switch and Tommy was nearly blinded. Warm orange light lit up the tent.

“Bright,” Tommy grumbled, covering his eyes. Blinking away the spots in his vision.

“Sorry,” Wilbur said, as he leaned up and clipped the lantern to the string above their heads. Now that it wasn’t in Tommy’s face, it wasn’t nearly as bright. “Tada! Now we can see again.”

“I can finally read after dark,” Techno said dryly. “How is it that every light in this house has a dead bulb? I checked almost every room.”

“Maybe Philza forgot to turn them off after using them?” Wilbur shrugged, “I’ve noticed he can see clear in the dark. He might not have noticed them burning themselves out.”

Techno mumbled a few choice words about the lack of light, before pulling a familiar book from the blankets. The Art of War that Sam gave him was still pristine in its condition. Techno was careful not to bend any pages. Handling it with care.

“You should read it to us,” Wilbur moved around until he was laying on his side, pulling Tommy over to rest in his arms. “Like old times.”

Old times was a week ago. But it felt so much longer than that. Almost every night, the three of them would listen to Techno’s precise words as he read out loud from a book. It had been a life time since then.

Techno hesitated, then thumbed through the pages until he was at the beginning. The Art of War had been read many times. But there was always something new to learn it was read.

Tommy squirmed in Wilbur’s arms until his head was resting against Wilbur’s arm. Something was poking him in the back. He shifted to the side. And then again. That thing was still stabbing at him.

“Ow,” Tommy whined, looking up at Wilbur.

Wilbur blinked with confusion. Patting his chest to see what was irritating Tommy. Finally, his hand landed on his pocket. And a sad realization dawning on his face.

Gently, Wilbur pulled out a golden pair of glasses. The lens had melted away, leaving only the metal circular frames. One of the few things that survived the fire.

“Dad’s glasses.” Techno choked out, and Tommy suddenly had to blink rapidly to keep his eyes from stinging.

“I took them. When Karl let us go home.” The memory of the blackened home, the smell of smoke thick in the air, made Tommy’s mouth go dry. “I’m sorry, I should’ve told you sooner. I just- I didn’t-”

“Good.” Techno’s voice was thick, and he swiped a hand over his face. “I’m glad you did. At least we have something of our parents left.”

“I should’ve told you sooner,” Wilbur whispered, “I’m sorry.” He put the frames on one of the pillows. A bit of ash still clung to the metal. Darkening the golden wire.

Techno leaned over and picked them up. Inspecting the frames. He pulled on the temple’s of the glasses, the hinges struggling to allow the motion, until the frames were open. And then he quietly leaned forwards, placing the frames onto Wilbur’s face. The metal resting on Wilbur’s nose and ears.

“You should wear them,” Techno muttered, “they fit you.”

“I-,” Wilbur choked up, reaching up to touch them softly. As if they would break. “What if I lose them?”

“You won’t.” Techno replied firmly. “I know you won’t.”

“Bitch,” Tommy nodded in agreement. Which meant, “you have to wear them asshole, keep ‘em.”

Wilbur’s smile was a bit wobbly from emotion, and he grabbed Tommy and squeezed him tight. Then he reached out and grabbed Techno’s shirt and pulled him in roughly. Sending the middle brother heavily onto Wilbur’s lap. Nearly crushing Tommy in the process.

“Off!” Tommy choked, and Techno let out a squawk of surprise.

Wilbur was giggling. Grabbing Techno and squeezing him closer. Tommy letting out swear words as he was pinned between the two.

“Wilbur!” Techno let out a whine, struggling to get out of Wilbur’s tight grip.

“You can’t be nice to me without a mandatory hug,” Wilbur chuckled darkly under his breath. Wrestling with Techno while Tommy squeaked. Finally, Tommy found an opening and squirmed out of Wilbur’s grasp. Scurrying to the other side of the tent, which wasn’t a lot of space.

Wilbur was laughing as Techno grunted and huffed, the two began to wrestle in earnest. A tangle of limbs, wings, and puffed up feathers. The tent shook and Tommy wondered if it would collapse on them. Sending the blanket down over their heads. But instead, Techno won. Flipping Wilbur onto his stomach and pinning him down, his wings pressing against Wilbur's to keep him still. Long pink hair slipped from the braid Techno put it in, falling into his eyes.

Wilbur was still giggling. And after a moment, when it became clear that Techno won, Techno started to laugh too. Tommy grinned, crawling forwards and clambering on top of Wilbur's prone body with Techno. Sitting on his brother.

"Ugh!" Wilbur wheezed out, "you're both so heavy."

"Are you calling Tommy fat?" Techno teased, and Tommy gave him a playful scowl.

"I'm calling both of you fat." Wilbur groaned. "Get off."

Techno relented, sliding off of Wilbur and pulling Tommy away as well. Wilbur sat up, hand against his back. "You two were going to break my spine."

"Deserved," Tommy chimed, and Techno broke out in a guffaw.

Wilbur wrinkled his nose, and leaned in, "you know what, Tommy?" He held his hands up, his fingers crooked.

"Hm?" Tommy said, leaning away.

"You need to meet... the tickle monster*!" Wilbur pounced, running his fingers up and down Tommy's sides. Tommy let out a shriek, before it transformed into helpless giggles.

(*a terrible powerful creature indeed. It appears in pairs. Not to be confused with the monster under the bed or the mothman.)

"No!" Tommy said breathlessly, trying to bat at Wilbur's hands. "No! Stop!" He laughed.

"Uh oh," Techno chimed in, "looks like there was another monster waiting in the bush!" And he joined in, and Tommy squealed loudly when both of his brothers attacked him. Pushing at their hands fruitlessly.

Finally, when tears began to fill Tommy's eyes, did Wilbur and Techno stop. All of them wearing the same breathless smile. The lantern swayed back and forth as they moved underneath the blanket. Casting their shadows onto the fabric.

But for now, they don't have to worry about the outside world. In here, in their makeshift sanctuary, everything was safe again. Just the three of them. Carefree and together.

Nothing could ever tear them apart.

This could be the happy ending.

This could be the part where you stop.

Go no further. This won't end well. Not for the Soot children. Nor for anybody in this story.

Perhaps, if things had happened differently, the orphans could've had a content and peaceful life. They could have been raised by the caring and doting Sam. A man who strove for justice and virtue. A pillar of honesty in society. He would've done everything he could have to raise the three boys.

If you closed this tab right now, you can pretend, just as Tommy did, that they got to live their happy ever after with Sam. That Count Philza mysteriously vanished, and was nowhere to be found. Leaving the boys to be adopted to a man who truly desired to have a family. Who understood their needs and gave them everything they could to have a prosperous future.

Why don't you go?

Please.

It is the solemn duty to share the full story of the Soot Orphans. And it wouldn't be the truth if it ended right here. This is the turning point. Where you can't return from. Misery and unending woe begins and there is nothing you can do to stop it.

If only things went right. If only Sam had been able to witness the true depths of Philza's darkness. If only Jack had been able to escape and warn the children. If only...

Well. The popular saying "dead men tell no tales," is particularly true. But their corpses can spin a pretty story.

Tommy was fast asleep when he felt the mattress shift slightly. He grumbled as the heat of his brother left, turning over to bury his face against Wilbur's stomach. There was a gruff, "gonna get some water," from Techno. A normal occurrence. Tommy didn't think any more of it. Simply slipping back into his dreams.

The startled scream woke him abruptly. Wilbur stiffening next to Tommy, and then suddenly, he too was gone. Leaving Tommy in the rapidly fading warm nest.

"Techno?" Wilbur yelled down the hallway. And Tommy was slow to rise. He sat up in the nest. Rubbing at his eyes, yawning slowly. The lantern still swayed above his head. The light turned off. Leaving him in darkness.

Tommy waited a minute. His head dropping every so often. There was distant yelling. Tommy couldn't make out the words. But it woke him up enough to want to find out what was going on. He could hear Techno and Wilbur saying something- but it didn't make sense. He caught a word.

Blood?

Was one of them hurt?

Tommy climbed out of the nest, his feet unsteady. And he padded out of the door and down the hallway. The noises got louder. Wilbur was shouting something, his voice pitched high and scared.

Tommy walked faster. His feet cool against the bare wood.

"-get away!" Wilbur's voice cracked with terror. "Stay away from us--"

Tommy turned the corner and hovered in the doorway cautiously. Wilbur was pressing Techno behind his back, his brown wings flared out to hide his brother. The feathers shaking. Or maybe that was Techno, as he hunched over to make himself look smaller. There was a wild look in Wilbur's eyes that Tommy had never seen before.

In front of them was Philza. Standing completely still and relaxed. Wearing his long dark clothes, that fucking smile plastered to his face. He stepped closer to Wilbur and Techno.

That was when Tommy saw the blood. It was smeared across Techno's pale cheeks. Standing out brightly.

Oh no, was Techno hurt? What the fuck happened?

Tommy stepped forwards from the shadow of the doorway, a concerned chirp slipping out of his mouth.

Wilbur gasped out absolute terror in his eyes, as Philza's head snapped to Tommy.

A pleased grin curled his lips, "forgetting someone?" He said, his voice was thick with amusement.

"Tommy! *Run!*" Wilbur shrieked, but it was too late.

Confusion stalled Tommy enough and Philza's long legs did the rest. He barely had a second before giant hands clasped themselves around his torso, pulling him up and-

Tommy snarled. He *hated* being picked up if his flock wasn't the ones doing it. With an angry click, Tommy sank his teeth into Philza's arm.

At least, he tried to. His sharp fingernails scratched and clawed at the thick material. Tommy bit even harder. Making his jaw throb with pain. But whatever Philza's jacket was it was too thick for his sharp teeth to break through.

Philza squeezed. Tightly. Wrapping the arm that Tommy didn't have in his mouth around Tommy's torso. Leaving Tommy's legs to dangle and kick out fruitlessly.

"Stop! Stop leave him alone-!" Wilbur's voice was almost drowned out by Tommy's hissing and clicks.

Tommy finally had the bright idea to unlock his jaw and attack the fucker in the face. He pulled his head back, hitting Philza's collarbone. But the arm went with him.

Instead of Tommy biting him, Philza was now pushing his arm into Tommy's mouth firmly. "Now, now," Philza chided softly, "let's calm down and *talk*, hm?"

Tommy kicked and scratched and twisted, trying to get out of the hold. But it was too tight. There wasn't anything to leverage himself against. He couldn't move an inch. A whimper slipped between the angry breaths.

"Stop, stop." Wilbur pleaded, holding his hands out. His legs giving up as he took a step forward, "please don't hurt him. Don't hurt him. Please stop!"

Philza crooned next to Tommy's ear. And Tommy let out a terrified chirp through his nose. His fingernails stopped digging in. Now scrabbling at the leather to pull the arm off of him. His legs grew heavy with exhaustion. Even as he tried to kick and flail.

Philza laughed, breath hot against Tommy's ear. The smell of iron was so much stronger.

"Little fighter," Philza praised him, and then, "I won't hurt him. But."

"But what?" Techno finally spoke up, sounding wrecked. Through burry eyes Tommy saw his brother curled up in the corner. Stuttering the words out, "are you going to skin him like the man down in the basement? Hurt him? Torture my little brother? S-slice his throat like you did a few minutes ago?"

What?

"Techno, no. You silly boy." Philza chuckled lightly, "Jack was... a part of my hobby. You three my children. I wouldn't dare. I would never hurt you."

Wilbur choked on his breath, "*killing people is your hobby?*"

Tommy always knew Philza was a wrong'un. But this took the cake. Tears were stinging his eyes now.

Philza waved his spare hand in the air in a so-so motion. "Sometimes it's a job too. Don't worry your little heads about it. It's something that won't affect you. Not for a long time."

Tommy's breath was too fast. Even as he still tried to kick and squirm, his movements were slowing down. Exhaustion creeping in. It wasn't working. He was trapped. Tommy let out another terrified warble.

Philza cooed.

That seemed to be the breaking point for Tommy's rage. He went limp. He choking and hiccupping between breaths. Silently begging Wilbur to do something.

Wilbur inched closer, hands up as if he could catch Tommy. Philza look a step back. Holding Tommy tightly to his chest.

"I won't hurt your brother," Philza said, keeping his eyes trained on Tommy. A smile on his lips. "But I'm afraid some new rules are going to be put into place."

"Like what?" Techno was trying to plaster on a brave face. But his pale cheeks and shaking fists told another story.

Tommy felt a hand touch his hair. He flinched and whimpered as Philza ran his fingers through it gently. The sharp talons scratched at his skin lightly.

A threat.

Tommy whined for help. Begging for his flock to save him.

"For one, Tommy is going to stay with *me*." Philza crooned happily. Softly shifting back and forth like he was rocking Tommy in his arms. "And if you're good enough, you may get to see him. If not, then you'll have to deal with being alone."

"You can't take him!" Wilbur cried. "You- you *can't*!"

Phil laughed. A touch of cruelty in the sound. But it softened as he pressed his nose into Tommy's hair. "I think I already have. You were so brave, Wil, telling me how you'll run away and call the police. That you'll have me locked up behind bars. But you forgot your little brother. Tsk tsk."

"Don't hurt him," Wilbur crumbled, tears spilling from his eyes. "He's just a kid. Please. Please don't."

"One day," Count Philza spoke into Tommy's hair as he pressed a dry kiss to his temple, "you'll trust me when I tell you things. Isn't that right, Tommy?"

Tommy let out a long scared whine.

Philza laughed under his breath. "One day," this time more wistfully, "you're going to love being in my arms. I can't wait."

Fat chance. Tommy tried to squirm again, but it was futile. Wilbur openly crying on the ground. Techno pressed up against the corner, as if he could hide himself away in the crack. There was nothing they could do. They were all trapped.

"The windows and doors are locked, don't try to leave." Philza spoke up, and his voice was demanding and in control. "If you do, you'll never see Tommy again. He will come *with* me if the police show up."

A beat. Wilbur slowly nodded.

Philza crooned, pleased. "Good boys." He purred, "now, it's late. Go back to bed. And tomorrow we can discuss the new rules over breakfast. If you're very, very good, you can see Tommy at dinner. Understood?"

Philza didn't wait for an answer. Straightening up, pulling Tommy closer.

"Tommy!" Wilbur croaked out, "Tommy- please *no* . Don't take him away. Please." Wilbur inched forwards and recoiled in fear when Philza looked at him.

"I know it'll be hard. Taking a member of your flock away always is. But he will be right in this house. He won't be very far at all." Philza spoke softly, almost caringly. "He will be okay. You'll see."

Tommy was not okay right now and this was *awful*. He kicked out weakly, struggling to breath from behind the tears and snot. He called out for Wilbur and Techno. Warbling in terror.

There were two familiar chirps. His brothers. His flock. They were here.

And then a low unfamiliar whistle made Tommy's skin crawl.

Tommy let go of Philza's sleeve, holding out his hands to Wilbur. Whimpering. Trying to squirm once again, but he didn't have the energy anymore.

He wanted his brothers. He wanted his flock. He *hated* this.

"I know, I know." Philza hummed, turning Tommy away from Wilbur and Techno. "It's very scary. But it won't be. Not for very long."

Tommy could hear Wilbur crying behind them. And Philza began to walk away. Towards the long staircase that went *up, up, up* towards the tallest part of the house.

Tommy burst into a wave of fresh tears when it finally hit him that he was alone. He hated being by himself. Always clinging to Techno or Wilbur. And now they were gone.

Philza let out a sad noise, "there, there, Tommy. It'll be okay." He pressed his nose against Tommy's hair, "your father has you now."

Chapter End Notes

total deaths: four

Kids: having a good time

Phil in the corner: 

..... it took a surprising amount of time to fix this chapter up. It went from 2.5 to 7.5k in about two days. Ngl, writing Sam was difficult. I am not an awesamdad fan, so... i think you can imagine what will happen to him in this unfortunate fic. We are also finally hitting some prewritten stuff so there might be another update in the near future.

The Bad Beginning Part Four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Philza's room was similar and frightening all at once. Tommy could hear the cries of his brothers echoing up the stairs, his own sobs covering the noises sometimes. It was cut off abruptly when Philza kicked the door closed. Cutting off the only way out of the room.

Philza cooed and whistled, but it only made Tommy cry harder. Finally, he placed Tommy down in the middle of the nest. What felt like miles of thick material surrounding him. Tommy would trip and stumble across it if he tried to run.

It was similar to their nest, all of the blankets were the same. The same scent, this time thicker, almost choking as Tommy gasped for air. They had built their nest out of Philza's materials. It made Tommy feel sick at the thought.

The man pulled away from Tommy. Just for a moment. And Tommy was finally able to release his jaw, spit thick against his chin. Tommy let out a loud trill for Techno and Wilbur, and Philza was next to him. Hovering over him. His giant black wings unfolding. Stretching out. Covering him completely in darkness.

"Shhhh," Philza whispered, his breath hot against Tommy's forehead. He was so close. So so close.

Tommy let out one more terrible trill. And then fell horribly silent. Shaking.

It was dangerous. It was dark. And that meant he had to stay very still and very quiet. Else something might get him. At least, that's what his instincts were telling him.

That danger was cocooning him. Pressing the wings around until it was only the two of them in the world.

Tommy hiccupped and sobbed. The noises slowly vanished. Until he was quietly sniffling. Tears still flowed down his cheeks.

"There you go," Philza moved slightly, and his feathers rustled like the wind through dead leaves. "Shhh, that's it. You're going to be fine, lil one. Calm down. You're doing so good."

Tommy wasn't calming down. But the tight fear coiled around his heart was loosening. And the urge to kick and squirm away was fading. Leaving his knees twitching from the aborted effort.

He cried and cried and wanted his flock but they weren't there. But even rivers had to run dry eventually. And Tommy found his eyes burning and his eyelids drooping.

It was so *dark*.

He could feel the nose pressed up in his hair. The calm breaths flutter the strands against his ears. The soft rustle of feathers as they slid against each other.

It was hot. Tommy twitched at that. It was so very warm in this tight cramped space. It was like they were both trapped under a blanket, their breath warming up their cheeks. Tommy yearned for the cold fresh air suddenly.

But it was warm and dark and Tommy's eyes were heavy. His breathing was evening out. Drawing in slower, deeper breaths.

Tommy is in the nest. But he is missing something. He wanted his flock.

Tommy whined. And the sky vibrated to respond. It startled him from his half drowsy state. Confusion- where-?

Wait, fuck.

This wasn't right. What the hell.

Tommy struggled to stay awake. Clumsily reaching up to push at Philza's chest. To try and get him off. But it did nothing. It was like pushing against a wall.

Philza crooned sweetly. His nose next to Tommy's ears. It was an unexpected sucker punch. Hitting a place Tommy hadn't even known existed. The buzz in his ears grew louder. The white noise swallowing up everything else.

It was... safe?

The whiplash slapped him hard. Tommy could barely hear his own scared keen above the noise swallowing everything up. It wasn't safe. But the noise said it was and Tommy's instincts latched onto it. Making Tommy almost convinced for a split second that everything was fine.

It flipped back. Leaving Tommy petrified once more. It wasn't safe. Not here. Not ever. He wasn't alone. Not when the monster above him took him away from his flock. Sweat stuck to his neck.

"You are such a little fighter," Philza hummed after a moment, "you don't know when to give up. Just like your mother. It'll be okay, Tommy. I know it's hard, being separated from your flock always is. But you have *me* now."

Tommy's eyes screwed tightly, a few tears escaping. He pushed against Philza's stomach, but it did nothing. It shifted after a moment, dry feathers shifting against the blankets as Philza moved.

Something touched Tommy's pinned wings.

Blind panic and fear rushed through Tommy, and he let out a shrill *scream*. Calling for his flock. Calling for *anybody*. He lashed out wildly. Sharp nails scratching, feet hitting blindly, thrashing and squirming to get *away*.

"Tommy-" was grunted out, but Tommy yowled over it. One hand was caught by Philza's shirt, and he yanked on it sharply. Trying to pull it free. But it didn't work and it only riled him up further. It fucking hurt.

Tommy tilted his head back and screeched for his flock.

Where was Wilbur? Where was Techno? Where was Wilbur *and* Techno? They weren't here. They were gone. They left him. He wasn't supposed to be left. They had to stay with him. They just let the mean asshole take him away and it wasn't *fair*.

Strong arms wrapped around Tommy, pulling him up to tightly press him against Philza's chest. Tommy kicked and grunted, his wings flapping wildly. "No!" He shouted, "no! Get off!" He pulled on his trapped hand and it *hurt* but Tommy won't stop!

Click.

A single noise cut through everything.

Tommy's heart stopped beating for a long, terrible, second. And then it fluttered again. But it was slowing down. Because Tommy stopped breathing. His limbs locked up, and he was petrified with terror.

That one sound hit something deep and primal. Telling Tommy to '*shut the fuck up*' and '*behave.*'

He shut the fuck up and behaved.

"Shh," Philza rumbled, pulling Tommy tighter to himself, "I'm sorry, nestling. I'm sorry."

Something wet hit Tommy's cheek. A drop.

A tear?

A hand clasped around the back of Tommy's neck. Cradling and supporting him like he was a *baby*. He wasn't though. He was a big fucking man.

He'd do something about it if he wasn't frozen in fear.

Another drop hit his face. And Philza finally pulled him away. Just enough so they could look at each other.

Three little cuts welled up with blood on Philza's cheek. Falling down and dripping onto-

Tommy whined when Philza swiped a thumb over the blood on his face. He closed his eyes. Not wanting to look. He didn't want to see the moment when the anger filled Philza's blue eyes.

He was so fucked-

"*Adorable.*" Philza cooed deeply. His voice went two octaves lower than normal.

Tommy's eyes shot open in shock.

Philza's pupils were huge and dark. A thin blue ring around them. His lips were pulled back in a beaming smile, showing off the razor sharp canines. The blood continued to slowly drip from the cuts, landing on Tommy's cheeks with a flinch.

"Aren't you just so cute?" Philza whispered, "I can't wait to see you covered in our enemies blood." He hummed, his eyes unfocusing for a second, "coming home, after a successful hunt, and I can mark you up with their blood. You three would look just so—" and the words faded into another buzzy croon.

His fingers brushing through Tommy's hair, one thumb swiping the blood across his skin. "Little one," Count Philza whispered, "little son. All mine. All of you. I waited for you to come home for *years*. My little nestlings, all bundled up under my wings. Safe and sound."

Tommy let out a pathetic whine, shying away from the touch. Tears budding up in his eyes again. And Philza's eyes refocused. Landing on him with laser focus. And the bright maniac grin faded to something softer.

"I'm so sorry, Tommy." Philza whispered, "I know. It's so terribly scary. But it'll be okay. Just close your eyes, and things will just... slip away. You won't even notice time pass by."

That sounded the opposite of what Tommy wanted. Even as his eyes burned and his lids felt heavy, Tommy definitely didn't want to sleep. Not in this nest, not without his flock. Philza cupped the back of his neck, holding him close again. Like a stupid baby. And he pulled Tommy closer. Nestling him in the crook of his neck.

"Shh, just go to sleep, little chick." Philza whispered, before crooning. The staticky buzz itched in Tommy's ears. And his eye lids fluttered. "It'll be just fine. You're safe with me. Nothing will ever hurt you here."

Tommy squirmed, but even those motions were sluggish and hard. His head hurt. The noise said he was safe-

His breath was evening out. Even as he struggled to keep his eyes open. Philza hummed and crooned, every noise knocking a tiny bit of Tommy's willpower out. It didn't help the man started to rock him back and forth just like Wilbur did. The room was so dark. The rustling of feathers was familiar enough. For just a second, just a tiny little moment, Tommy thought he was with Wilbur and Techno.

He fell asleep right then and there.

Tommy blearily opened his eyes. It was dark. He squirms around- he can't feel his flock nearby. He sniffles, but he can't smell them either. A small sense of awareness starts to wake up-

A cloth was pressed into his hands. They cling to it automatically, and Tommy's nose picks up Wilbur's sweat. A warm body was pressed up against him, and Tommy let out a low

grumble. Fuckin' Techno moving around too much.

He presses his face into Wilbur's shirt. Smelling flock. And everything around him slips away again.

He wakes up again. His eyes open, but it's dark. He's alone this time. Tommy can't feel anybody around him. He turns onto his stomach with a soft hiss, but he can smell flock. They're in their nest. It's safe. His nose presses into the soft blankets, and he passes out again soon after.

He opens his eyes.

It's dark.

Tommy sometimes has somebody in the nest with him. He can't think. Can't even muster up the energy to mentally note if it was Wilbur or Techno with him. He curls up as they scoop him into their arms. And he softly peeps sleepily. A tired welcome back.

They're nice and warm and Tommy didn't want to be alone. He wanted his flock.

The noise they make isn't normal. It sparks something distant. A faint ember that was only glowing flaring slightly. Tommy didn't recognize their voice. He tried to open his eyes-

A hand covered them. A soft shush, the rustling of feathers, and a, "go back to sleep," whispered in his ear. A new bit of cloth was pressed into Tommy's hand. And he latched onto it. Oh... it was Techno.

Tommy's wings fluttered happily, and his eyes closed once more.

Sometimes the taste of food lingered in Tommy's mouth but he didn't remember eating anything. Water dripped past his lips, and a bottle of water was held for him. Tommy didn't mind. He was really... sleepy...

The door opened, and Tommy didn't stir. He didn't move from his slumber. Even as steady hands picked him up and cradled him to a chest. The only thing Tommy latched onto was the bit of cloth that smelled like Techno. He clutched it close like it was a stuffed animal.

Tommy still didn't move as he was rocked back and forth. The sound of footsteps on stairs did stir him. His lips smacking a bit as he woke up. His limbs felt heavy and stiff from unuse. But it wasn't enough to make him move.

He heard the noise of a door closing, and that finally made him awake enough to open his heavy eyes.

But it was dark.

And they fell back down.

Tommy let out a tired sigh. He didn't even have the energy to move, instead, lying completely limp. Letting the familiar motion of being rocked back and forth lull him back into a dreamless sleep.

At least, Tommy tried to go back to sleep. The footsteps were loud, echoing around. Interrupting the silence that Tommy was used to. He let out a soft sigh, finding the smallest sliver of energy to turn his head and tuck it into-

Hmm. A shoulder. Yeah. Somebodies warm body... Tommy sniffed and oh- it was Techno. He could smell him. Barely. Over that other odd scent.

There was a soft coo, and Tommy sighed again. Clutching at the cloth in his hands.

A door opened and closed. Tommy didn't bother opening his eyes.

“Tommy?” A voice, scared and timid, whispered. Wilbur.

Tommy flicked a wing out sleepily. A soft grumble escaping him. He was *tired*, Wilbur. Read the fucking room.

“Stay in your seats, boys.” A third voice spoke. Tommy didn't really recognize it, but it came from right above his head. He sniffed again, but he couldn't smell anybody new. Just Techno.

“What- why is he so...” Techno sounded almost strangled.

“He's been resting.” Third voice purred, pleased. “I almost didn't want to disturb him for dinner. But you've both have been so good the past few days.”

Wilbur let out a short desperate whine. “Please-”

The third voice laughed, jostling Tommy slightly. He shifted, and Tommy felt himself being gently lowered in the mans arms. Still pressed up against the firm chest as the third man-?

Tommy sniffed and only found Techno. Yeah... Techno sat down with Tommy in his arms. Tommy let out a soft sleepy chirp, pressing his cheek against Techno's shoulder.

There was a choked sob. “What did you do to him?”

“Nothing.” The voice rumbled, “he's been very content to stay in my nest. He has been very good while I've been taking care of you two.”

Wilbur let out a sharp desperate whine, and that made Tommy stir a bit. His heavy eyelids sliding open just a fraction. There was light. Not much. Just a low candle lit, the flame barely illuminating the area.

Wilbur was sitting in a chair, leaning forwards. Hands outstretched like he wanted to catch Tommy from a fall. His cheeks were wet. Tommy's thoughts were... slow. And he let out a low trill meant to comfort Wilbur that he was okay-

A warm dry palm covered his eyes. "That's enough of that." Third voice spoke, softly. "You two said you would eat, and the food is getting cold."

"Can I- please- I'll be so good. Please, let me hold him. Please." Wilbur begged, and Tommy let out a soft whine. Why was Wilbur so sad? He shifted sluggishly, trying to move to Wilbur, but strong arms tightened carefully around him.

"No."

"What about the high chair?" Techno asked quickly, sounding desperate.

"Tommy doesn't like sitting in high chairs," third voice was smug. "You both knew the reward was seeing your brother. Now, please. Eat. Do not make me ask you a third time."

There was a hitched breath, and the scrape of a metal fork against porcelain. The chest Tommy was pressed up against rumbled with a pleased croon. His eyes slipped closed again, and after a few minutes, the palm over his eyes slipped away. Cupping his chin and rubbing a thumb over his cheek.

Tommy snuffled a bit, before leaning into the palm. Letting it hold his head up. It was warm. He let out a soft chirp, and it was replied with a soft croon. There was a rustling of feathers, and Tommy blinked one eye open to see a curtain of darkness fold over him.

Where did Wilbur go? Tommy grumbled, reaching up one heavy hand and pushed at the feathers. His fingers meeting the dark silky quills and he latched on. "Wil'by?" Tommy mumbled up to Techno, "where?"

"Shh, he's right over there." The voice was soft and sweet, and Tommy grunted. Long fingers reached up and uncurled his fist from the feathers, and Tommy latched onto those. Gripping them tightly.

"Wil'by." Tommy slurred out, "'es flock."

"Yes, yes he is." The voice sighed happily, "he's our flock, isn't he Tommy?"

Tommy grunted again, and he almost didn't hear the choked sob. But it registered. He pried one eye open again. "Sad? Wil'b sad?"

"Just a little, but it's okay. He misses you." The feathers shifted to the side, and Tommy could see through a tiny little crack. Wibur was sitting ram rod straight, fork in hand, his eyes red rimmed, and his mouth wobbly. He stared at Tommy with a desperate look.

"Is fine," Tommy's eyes were too heavy now. And they slid shut for the final time, "'m here."

"Yes, you're right here. Where you belong." The voice purred, "and if your brothers continue to listen, maybe next time they can hold you. Won't that be nice? Right Techno?"

There was a scrape of metal against a plate, “yes.” Techno replied, hushed. “It would be nice.”

The voice hummed a bit. But with the dark feathers blocking the little light in the room, Tommy couldn’t stay awake any longer. Drifting off. Words exchanged over his head became distant murmurs.

“I had an interesting little visitor today,” the voice rumbled and grumbled. “Imagine my surprise the neighbor came knocking to check up on you three.”

There was a fearful gasp, and a clatter of a fork. “Please,” Wilbur whispered, “please don’t hurt Sam.”

Tommy felt himself being shifted closer. Pressing his face closer to Techno. He let out a half sleepy chirp. The chest his ear was pressed up against rumbled. “Me? No. I won’t hurt him. No, I was... surprised. He clearly cares about you to come check up on you. In fact, I told him he could come over and see you two tomorrow. Now, if you are on your best behavior, he will leave here untouched. But if you don’t...”

There was a dull silence. The clock in the background slowly ticking away as seconds passed.

“We won’t do anything.” Techno said, finally breaking silence. Rousing Tommy just for a moment. He could barely flutter his eyelashes. Completely exhausted.

“I hope so.” The voice was thick was amusement, shifting a hand up and brushing a lock of hair from Tommy’s forehead. “Especially for Sam’s sake.”

The knock on the door was polite. Wilbur and Techno stood next to each other. Hands clasped tightly. Almost afraid that one of them would be the next to be stolen away. Just like Tommy.

They spent the last few days practically glued to each other. Knees always touching, fingers clinging, shoulders always side by side. As if to make up the missing gap in their flock by touch.

Just the thought of Tommy locked away in some dark room made tears burn in the corners of Wilbur’s eyes. But he furiously blinked them back. Philza said he had to be good. Or else... Or else Sam would get hurt.

Wilbur had seen the remains of the poor man in the basement. Just a glimpse. Techno whispered about the details with shaking hands, a distant but horrified expression on his face. Of the room he stumbled into, deep below the house, that smelled of old blood.

Phil strode by them slowly. The slide of feathers the only noise he made. Wilbur and Techno shied away. Leaning away from the tall man. Wilbur’s wings pinned tightly to his back to make him appear smaller.

A hand tipped with black talons rested on Wilbur's shoulder. Pulling him gently, but firmly, to stand straighter. Before it traveled up, a knuckle brushing against his chin. Tilting it up. Before a thumb rested against his cheek.

There was a soft *click*.

"Didn't get enough sleep?" Count Philza asked, softly, as if every word he spoke didn't light every nerve in Wilbur's stomach.

They hadn't been able to get a full nights rest in their nest since Tommy was taken. It felt like countless sleepless nights had passed, but it had only been a handful of days. They both woke up several times a night, missing a small body pressed up between the two. Wilbur felt Techno's hand tighten.

Count Philza took the silent pause as an answer. "What was the first rule?" He asked, still so soft.

"Keep ourselves healthy." Wilbur whispered, not meeting Philza's eyes.

The thumb swiped across his cheek. Back and forth. The heat of it burning into his skin. "Keeping yourself up late isn't following that rule." Philza hummed, and Wilbur couldn't suppress a shiver.

"I'm not- it's-" Wilbur stuttered, "I can't. Sleep." He swallowed. His eyes flicking to the door as it was knocked on again.

Philza let out a soft sympathetic croon. His eyes were only on Wilbur. Not bothering to give a sign that somebody was waiting outside. "I can help with that. I have something that can help you sleep."

It took Wilbur a second to realize what Philza was offering. A drug. Or something of the kind. His mouth went dry and Techno squeezed his hand tighter. The bones getting crushed in their tight grip. "No, thank you."

Philza's fingers tightened. Just a touch. "It'll help you sleep better."

"I'll try harder tonight." Wilbur replied, heart in his throat.

There was another knock on the door. Philza's left wing twitched at the sound. Wilbur finally, timidly, glanced up at the taller man's face. Almost flinching away at the displeased look Philza had.

Then, with a sigh, Philza let go of his chin. Turning away. "I'll give you another night, Wilbur. But if you are not well rested tomorrow, we will have a *talk*." He walked up to the door, before glancing at the two boys. "Remember. Be good." And opened the door.

Sam stood on the doorway. An handful of books tucked under one arm. He gave a polite, but distant, smile to Philza. His hair wasn't as neat as it usually was, and it looked like his own eyes were rimmed with red. Like he had been upset about something.

“Good morning!” Sam said, cheerfully.

“Come in, come in.” Philza ushered him in, stepping aside and letting Sam in. “I’m so grateful you took time out of your busy schedule to help us.”

“Of course!” Sam said, beaming when he spotted Wilbur and Techno. The two boys were frozen in the hallway. “Good morning, you two. Aren’t you both just so excited? If I were in your shoes, I’d be jumping up and down in glee.”

Wilbur and Techno exchanged a confused glance. Then they looked back as Sam set down the books on a nearby table.

Sam took their pause as an answer. “And where is Tommy?” Sam asked, pulling a carrot stick from his pocket. “I harvested a carrot straight from my garden for him. Since it’s his favorite.”

Techno opened his mouth, and Wilbur nearly crushed his hand. He didn’t know what Techno would say. But he was impulsive.

Philza slid in. “He’s taking a nap at the moment.” Which was surprisingly truthful. “But I’m sure he’d like it when he wakes up.”

“Oh,” Sam seemed to wilt just a little bit. Setting the carrot down on the table alongside the books. “Well, I suppose we ought to get right into things then.”

“Yes.” Philza agreed.

“Um,” Techno spoke up, and Wilbur’s heart rate skyrocket. “What exactly... are we doing?”

“Oh just the forms, really.” Sam waved his question away. “Small stuff. The law, as you know, works in meticulous tiny steps. Which means, signing quite a lot of paperwork. Don’t worry, you only have to sign once Wilbur.”

“I- what?” Wilbur glanced at Sam and then at Philza. Unsure what was happening. Desperately trying to read the room.

“Now, don’t get too excited. We need to do paperwork before we get to the official forms first. Although, that’ll take a day or two. I need to file these first with the courthouse before we can do the official ceremony.” Sam spoke to Philza, “it roughly takes about forty eight hours.”

Philza looked vaguely annoyed by that. There was a cold disinterested look plastered over his face. “Any way you could... speed that up? We are just so impatient, you see.”

Sam shrugged, “I’ll see what I can do. I do have an old friend who works up in the financial report area. Maybe she could pull strings?” He pulled a file of papers from where it was tucked into a book. “I will need you to start filling out these.”

“What is-?” Techno loudly started to say, and Wilbur stomped on his foot. Hard.

“What my brother means, what kind of paperwork is that?” Wilbur asked, pasting an innocent look on his face. “Techno is interested in the law.”

“Yes.” Techno bit out, nudging Wilbur in the side with a sharp elbow. “What kind of forms are those?”

“Oh, they are for your adoption.” Sam said, and his smile did a funny wobble.

Stunned silence fell over the boys.

“Imagine my surprise when I came over yesterday and your lovely guardian said that you wanted to be adopted and asked for my help.” Sam acted a bit flustered, picking up a paper and shuffling it around. Fiddling with the pile. Trying to hide the way his smile fell. “I was surprised! But I’m so happy for you. To find your forever home so fast... luck must be on your side. I’m sure Count Philza will be a wonderful father.”

Without thinking, Wilbur said, “what? Why?”

There was a dead silence.

Philza slowly looked up from his paper. Pinning Wilbur down with a blank stare.

“I-I mean,” Wilbur stammered, “why... did you come over? Not, um. For the. Other thing.” Techno elbowed him again. Wilbur’s teeth snapped shut before he dug himself deeper.

“Oh...” Sam seemed to actually wilt. “Perhaps I have become... accustom to your presence in my house. It always felt more lively with you three around. When you didn’t come over for a few days, I wanted to see if you were okay. Forgive me for being such a nosy neighbor.”

“Thank you for thinking of us.” Wilbur spoke.

Techno piped up. “What kind of books are those?”

“Oh, just some legal books. Not very fun to read, and I have to for my job. Full of jargon and complicated words. Would you like to take a look?”

“I do like jargon and complicated words.” Techno agreed, and he pulled Wilbur along side to take a look at the handful of thick books.

Sam beamed at that, “oh, you are lucky, Count Philza. To have boys as smart and intelligent as these two.” He gave a wistful sigh.

“I know.” Philza smiled, tightly.

Techno pulled a book from the top, and flipped open to the page of contents. Skimming it, before finding one, and pulling to the page. He was up to something. And Wilbur could only hope his brother had a plan. He didn’t.

“So.. you said I had to sign something?” Wilbur nervously wiped his hands on his jeans.

"Don't worry. You just have to sign the official papers. Nothing complicated. It'll just be you and your brothers, along with your new father, and me. Although..." Sam tapped on his chin. "I suppose we do need witnesses for the document. Do you three have anybody in mind you'd like to be there?"

"Witnesses?" Philza looked up from a document. A distant look in his eyes.

"I need at least three. I don't count, since I'm officiating."

"I suppose... I could call them." Philza muttered, more to himself. "I don't know where they might be right now. Could take a few days for them to come in."

Wilbur had a horrible, terrible idea. His heart rate skyrocketed. But. It could be their last chance. Adoption meant another trap. Another thing Philza could have over their heads. Although Wilbur didn't know why Philza was doing it, he was already their legal guardian. What was the point of adopting his prisoners?

"What about your friend, Sam?" Wilbur asked, trying his best to keep his sudden spike of adrenaline from showing. "Ponk, right?"

Sam's eyebrows shot up. "Ponk?"

"Yes. You said he was very nice. Since," Wilbur didn't dare look at Philza, instead he tilted his head towards his direction, "you said your... um. That it would take a few days."

"Ponk could bring a few mutual friends of ours. If you're looking for people to fill in." Sam said, "I'm sure he'd be honored to be a witness for your adoption."

Philza was already shaking his head, lips twisting in words to decline the offer. And Wilbur panicked. This was their last hope. They *needed* Ponk.

Who else could save them other than the chief of police?

"I'll—" Wilbur said quickly, and Philza's eyes landed on him. Making him freeze in place. "I'll..." His thoughts were scrambling for something- anything to make Philza agree. It landed on one and it was horrible. But if it brought Ponk into the house...

"I'll," Wilbur swallowed, "I'll sleep better. Tonight." A freezing sweat broke out across his back. "Please."

Philza seemed to think about it.

For a moment.

A faint smile tugging on his lips, before it pulled up into a pleased smirk. Pinning Wilbur with that look. Wilbur couldn't look away. Like a deer in headlights. "Of course. I don't mind who you invite, as long as they are here and on time." He waved dismissively at Sam.

Sam let out a small cough. A faulty smile plastered on his face. "It's... lovely to see how excited you are to be adopted, Wilbur. I'm happy for you."

"Thank you," Wilbur said, but his voice sounded distant. His thoughts were wrapped up by the deal he had just made. His anxiety spiking up, twisting his stomach in circles. Dread sinking into his heart, making it struggle to beat.

Despite it all, he desperately hoped that it would be worth it. That it would be a worthy sacrifice. To save them all from Count Philza.

Chapter End Notes

abosolutely no editing today, we ballin' boys.

The Bad Beginning Part Five

Chapter Summary

bad times for techno <3

Chapter Notes

tw: spooky times. slight violence.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was against the rules to hide in their nest all day.

It was stupid. All of the rules were. Technoblade wanted to break every single one of them just to spite the old man. But then he remembered Tommy, and wilted.

Instead of spending their day holed up in their nest, Tommy's smell slowly vanishing from the blankets, the two of them spent most of their time in the library. A single working lightbulb in one lamp. The curtains closed, even though the sun was bright outside and they didn't have to use the artificial light.

Techno was tempted to pull the curtains apart, let the sunlight in the room, but it wasn't allowed.

But to break one of Philza's rules was too much to bear. The idea of going days without seeing Tommy made Techno's legs feel weak. He couldn't breathe deeply either. He had to be good. Follow the guidelines and then maybe...

Wilbur's hand squeezed in Techno's. His older brother gave him a faint smile of reassurance. Techno's steps increased in pace. A flat item under Techno's shirt pressed up against his stomach. The weight of it heavy in his arms.

Sam had left. And Philza was doing *something*. The two of them retreated back to the library. To the only working lamp in the house and a couch that was too big and black curtains blocked out the world around them. Their little brother hidden away and kept prisoner above their heads.

Wilbur was pale and sweaty. Holding onto Techno tightly. He was scared. So was Techno. They were both so terrified. Of the Count. Of whatever scheme he was planning. Scared for

Tommy, locked away in the dark and dismal house. The terrifying lack of awareness that Tommy had during dinner.

“Why did you make a deal with him?” Techno asked, as soon as the door to the library closed. “You didn’t have to-”

“What choice did we have, Techno?” Wilbur asked back, “wait until a pizza delivery and yell for help? If we can get people nearby and tell them we are in danger...” he trailed off, lost in thought.

“What if,” Techno asks, the words dropping into a pit in his stomach, “we are going to get Sam and Ponk killed?” He had seen it. The man, tied to a chair. The sound of something dripping had caught his attention while he was going for a glass of water. Techno walked towards it, thinking it was a faucet that needed to be turned off.

He saw the blade, the man jerking back and forth to get away, the gag in his mouth, and the *smile* Philza wore.

Wilbur didn’t. He only saw a glimpse. But Techno witnessed it *all*.

“They’ll have guns, right?” Wilbur asked nervously, “I mean, they’re policemen. If Philza went for them then they can just shoot him, right?”

“I don’t know.” Techno asked, shifting on his feet. “I hope they shoot him.” The item under his shirt shifted, and in the privacy of the library, he slipped the book out from where he hid it.

“Where did you get that?” Wilbur asked, shocked.

“I stole it from Sam’s pile of books,” Techno flipped the cover to Wilbur. ‘*Adoption Laws and You.*’ “There is something going on. There is a reason why Philza wants you to sign those papers. And I want to know *why*.”

“You stole.” Wilbur said bluntly and with a slight hint of horror, “you stole from Sam?”

“I’m *borrowing* it. Plus, if Philza knew I had it, he might take it away.” Techno hugged the book tight against his chest. “We need to know why he wants you to sign the adoption papers.”

“Do you have enough time to read it all? Philza and Sam said that this could happen soon.”

Techno eyed the thick tome in his hands. The words were tiny against the white sheet of the page. He nodded, “yes. I could. It might take me all night, but I can do it.” He crossed the room and sat on the couch, “if I start immediately.”

Wilbur flopped onto the furniture next to him. Pressing up heavily against Techno’s side. Techno leaned into his brother as well. His feathers up against Wilbur’s.

The second the two of them stopped touching each other, the world felt like it was ending. And it *was*. Without Tommy, their final member of their small flock, they stood on the

precipice of a cliff. If they fell, they'd lose themselves.

Wilbur was the only one who was keeping Techno level headed. Instead of falling into a panic attack.

They were barely able to keep themselves together. Threads creaking, threatening to snap. More than once, Techno wanted to fall on the ground and *cry*.

If they were only able to stay coherent because of each other, Techno worried about Tommy. He was alone. By himself. Was he okay? Was he scared? Was he crying right now for his flock?

Was Techno failing him?

Wilbur poked Techno's stomach. Making him jump.

"What?"

"You haven't turned the page yet." Wilbur spoke, sharing a knowing and haunted look with Techno.

Right. Techno had to focus. Pushing his worries to the side, he began to read the tiny text in front of him.

After a few minutes, Techno blinked and rubbed the space between his eyes. Sam hadn't been wrong about how complicated the jargon was. The sentences were full of complex words and double meanings.

Wilbur grabbed one of the books near Techno and flipped it open. "You got this, Techno." Wilbur spoke, and Techno only let out a grunt.

It was going to be a long one.

On the website of archiveofourown.org there is a series of ratings that an author may use on their writing. It ranges from the general G rating, for the preteens, all the way up to E for explicit, for the adults.

It is a solemn duty to share the story of the Soot Orphans. As you can see above, it is rated M for mature.

M is also another word for murder. Perhaps, misery. Or melancholy. All of those words describe this story very well. It is not merry, mirthful, or merciful. Quite the opposite. It is morose.

It is lachrymose. Dolorous. Lugubrious.

All of those words are colorful ways of saying: sad.

There have been many warnings thus far in this story, and there will be more as you continue. As you continue to unravel the story of the Soot Orphans, the darker it will be.

Turn back now. Close the tab. Go outside and touch grass, if the weather permits it. Take in a deep breath and thank whatever you believe in that you are not around to witness these events.

There is malevolence and maliciousness. It is miasmic, seeping in and spreading into your bones. It is malign. A disease that will not leave you, much like how it haunts us.

You ought to leave. Move away. Migrate to a new fic. Mosey on.

While you still can.

It was difficult to determine the time when the curtains held back the sun's rays. But there was a grandfather clock that let out a soft click at every hour. One that Techno ignored.

The sound of footsteps, however, was not.

Wilbur jabbed an elbow into Techno's side in alarm. Causing Techno to jump from the sudden pain.

"Hide the book," Wilbur hissed.

Techno fumbled, mind still cloudy after being hyper focused on the text. He shoved the book under the couch seat, while Wilbur tossed his book onto Techno's lap.

There was a sharp knock on the door before it immediately opened. Standing tall, even though he was clearly hunched over, stood Count Philza with a set of bowls in hand.

"Good evening," he said, sending chills down Techno's spine. Wilbur's hand found its place in Techno's.

"Good evening," Wilbur quietly replied, polite as ever. Techno remained silent.

There was always the unmistakable feeling that came with fight or flight instincts. Techno swapped between the two often. One second, wanting to cower away from the murderer. Then the terror mixed with rage hit him. He wanted to throw himself at Philza with his teeth bared and fingers extended. He wanted to fucking claw out those terrifying blue eyes.

Wilbur squeezed his hand again. Grounding him. Keeping him back from a battle Techno was sure to lose.

Philza strode in on those fucking giant legs of his. Setting the bowls on the small coffee table. "I figured both of you would like to eat up here instead of the dining hall."

There was a pause as both of the kids stared at the thick soup with a slice of bread on the side. They glanced at each other.

"Thank you." Wilbur replied.

It was a hard fast rule that they had to eat. Philza said they didn't have to eat everything on their plate. But they had to consume at least half of it.

Wilbur picked up the bowls and handed Techno his. The two were staring down at the contents. It was a thick stew. Carrots and potatoes were cooked and steamy, the aroma enticing.

There was an awful lot of meat in it. As there was in every meal. Techno and Wilbur never ate a bite of it. Leaving it behind on their plates. If Philza noticed, he didn't say a word.

Wilbur scooped up a diced carrot with the spoon and ate it. Techno pulled at the bread, ripping it into pieces before eating it dry. It was thick and moist, a touch of honey in the flavor of it. Techno never had bread like this. He could probably eat the whole loaf in one sitting, had he the chance.

"Do you like the bread?" Philza asked, watching Techno like a hawk.

Techno's mouth went dry. And the last piece of the loaf went tasteless in his mouth. He shrugged.

"I baked it this morning." Philza spoke with a pleased smile that crinkled the corners of his eyes.

This was the worst tasting bread Techno had ever eaten in his life. It was foul in his mouth. Fucking dry and shitty. Dollar store bread was better than this.

It was a good thing Philza had only mentioned the origins of the bread after Techno finished eating it. But the taste lingered sweet on his tongue.

He stabbed at a potato chunk in the stew. Eating it just to get rid of the taste.

It melted in Techno's mouth. His frown grew. He scowled down at his bowl with more ferocity after every bite.

He hated this. Every single fucking bit of it. It was so disgusting. Even as the flavors blended together harmoniously. Creating a rich and delicious meal.

It felt like garbage on his tongue.

Techno sat the bowl down after eating what he deemed was about half of it. The sauce and meat remained, the rest of the vegetables were gone. Wilbur did the same.

"Was it good?" Philza asked, staring at Wilbur with that fond look he always wore.

Wilbur was always too polite. Philza obviously knew it. Preying upon his brother. Wanting to hear the meek praise Wilbur could offer.

"Yes," Wilbur mumbled, grabbing Techno's hand again.

'No,' Techno wanted to say, but he wisely kept his mouth shut as Wilbur squeezed his fingers.

Philza beamed at the word. He looked so fucking pleased by forcing Wilbur to agree with him. Techno wanted to grab his spoon and fucking gouge out-

Wilbur squeezed Techno's hand again. Techno bit his lip.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. You needed something in your stomach before you took your sleeping medication," Philza stood up.

Wilbur's breath hitched, the feeble color in his cheeks fading.

"He is not taking anything," Techno spoke, pulling Wilbur closer to his side. "That isn't in your rules."

"Techno—" Wilbur whispered.

Philza eyed Techno with a knowing smile. "He hasn't been sleeping well, Techno. Neither have you. Rule one is that both of you are to remain healthy. If Wilbur had not agreed for a sleeping aid earlier today, I would enforce it tomorrow if he still hadn't slept." He took a step closer to Techno. The shadow of his wings spread out slightly.

Techno couldn't help but cower at the sight of those two large wings moving. The feathers brushed against the ground as Philza walked. Making a slight *hissing* noise.

"I will also give you a choice as well, Techno. Would you like some help to sleep tonight?" Philza bent over the two of them like a crooked tree.

Wilbur was shivering behind Techno. The two boys were clutching at each other tightly.

"No," Techno's voice came out tiny and small.

Philza's eyes narrowed. And he let out a slight puff of air, the corner of his mouth twitched upwards. "Very well. But if you don't rest well tonight, we will have a different talk tomorrow."

Techno swallowed the scared chirp that threatened to escape. His throat suddenly dry.

Philza's taloned hand lowered, opening his fist to reveal two small pills sitting on his palm. "Wilbur," he said, "would you like for me to get you some water?"

Wilbur stared at the unmarked pills, his shaking growing worse. He shook his head before burying his face against Techno's side.

"Come now, don't be like that," Philza crooned sweetly, "we made a little deal, Wilbur. Don't go back on it now."

Wilbur shuddered at the thought. Techno held onto him. Trying to cover him up from the piercing gaze with a tight hug.

A moment passes, and Wilbur shakes his head against Techno's side. Before peeling a trembling arm up and holding his palm up.

"Good boy," Philza purred as he dropped the drugs into Wilbur's hand. Wilbur closed his fist around them, his knuckles turning white as he drew his arm back.

Philza let out a soft click and Techno and Wilbur stiffened. "Sit up, so I can see."

Wilbur choked out a terrified noise, but slowly. Almost painfully, he pulled himself upright and away from Techno.

Techno closed the gap within a heartbeat. Grabbing onto Wilbur in a similar chokehold. The two switching places. Techno wrapped his arms around Wilbur's torso. Staring up at Philza with an accusing stare.

"Water?" Philza held out a plastic bottle. Techno hadn't seen where he had pulled it from.

Wilbur hesitated. Shaking. And slowly nodded. A trembling hand reached up and took the offered bottle.

"Here, let me." Philza twisted the lid off. The plastic cracking sharply. Wilbur and Techno flinched, a bit of water spilled. Dripping onto the floor.

"Need help?" Philza asked, his hand moving, but Wilbur shied away. More water dripping from the abrupt motion.

After a breath, Wilbur popped the pills into his mouth and then tipped the bottle up. Taking a handful of long drags until the bottle was half way empty.

When Wilbur was done, Philza took the bottle back. There was another soft click, and the two boys flinched.

"Open your mouth," Philza's voice was firm. But then it grew soft. "I just need to check, that's all."

Wilbur unlocked his jaw and opened his mouth. He jumped and let out a soft chirp when Philza reached out, his mouth closing with a click. His talons brushed against his cheeks before they pressed in. Not hard enough to draw blood. Just to feel if anything was hidden in Wilbur's cheeks.

Techno let out a soft hiss. Philza glanced down at him with a soft amused smile. "Silly," he murmured.

Philza stepped back. Much to the relief of the boys. Techno could feel Wilbur's tension leaving his back as he sank into the couch.

But it wasn't over yet. Instead of leaving them be, like Philza did after dinner, he sat down in one of the chairs. Pulling a stray book onto his lap and flipped it open.

He was fucking staying. Techno's grip on Wilbur's shirt grew tighter. Wilbur rested his palm over Techno's knuckles.

Philza looked up from the pages, giving them two a knowing look. He smiled, showing off sharp teeth. "I don't want you to have a bad reaction, Wilbur. I'm here to make sure you'll be okay. Don't worry."

Don't worry? Techno was going to show him what to worry about. After he claws Philza's face off.

Wilbur squeezed Techno's hand again. And Techno let out a breath.

It was a waiting game now. Techno was tempted to drag Wilbur back to their nest. But Philza wanted to watch. The idea of him being near their nest made him shudder with revulsion. It was better for them to stay here, if the man insisted on staring at them.

Techno hugged Wilbur tightly. Pressing his ear against Wilbur's stomach. Hearing the organs creak and grumble, but most importantly, his heart still beating.

If Philza fed his brother poison, Techno was going to fucking burn this house down. With the murderer inside.

Wilbur held Techno just as tightly. The occasional flip of a page breaking the silence. Reminding them they were not alone.

Did Philza feed Tommy the same pills? Force his brother to sleep like that? The hazy look in his eyes when he saw them. The way his words were slurred and mumbled. It wasn't *right*.

Was Tommy okay? Would they all be okay? Could they get out of here instead of becoming another set of victims to the murderer?

Would it be Wilbur strapped to the chair in the basement next time?

Techno wouldn't allow it. Even if it cost him his life.

The gentle beat of Wilbur's heart was soft and soothing. As time passed on, seconds turning into minutes, Techno's tight grip loosened. His face pressed up against Wilbur's stomach, blocking his vision completely.

The touch of his flock was so soothing. And so warm. Even if they were missing one of them.

He hadn't realized how tired he was until he heard the rasp of paper, jolting him out of a half doze. Techno blinked, it was dark. Wilbur's sweater blocked the light, and Techno's head felt fuzzy. The smell and warmth of Wilbur calming him down.

Techno moved, uncovering his eyes from Wilbur's stomach. He blinked at the light from the lamp. His eyes flicked over to the man across the room, but Philza was still and quiet. His attention was still on the book. Then Techno was distracted again.

Wilbur's head tipped downwards before it bopped back up. His eyes barely open slits. Closing for a long moment before they opened once more.

Wilbur noticed Techno's attention and he let out a soft whistle. Slumping over onto Techno with a quiet coo. Nuzzling his nose into Techno's neck.

Oh.

Techno shuffled a little bit so they weren't leaning onto each other awkwardly. Pulling Wilbur's heavy body onto himself. Their legs intertwined as he pulled them to lay on the couch. Shuffling his wings around until they curled around each other.

Wilbur let out a few soft noises and slurred words against Techno's neck. Techno ran his fingers through Wilbur's hair, and his brother let out a happy chirp.

A page turned.

Techno's hair stood on end.

That's right. Techno had been distracted, Wilbur pulling his attention away from the Count. The murderer was still here. A few feet away. And Techno had let his guard down.

Wilbur was out of it. Leaving Techno to keep him safe.

The snap of the book closing made Techno freeze. "I think he's nearly asleep. What do you say about going back to the nest? You're looking a little tired yourself, mate."

A hand tapped the edge of the couch twice, "come on, get up and go to bed, kiddo. I'll carry Wilbur up."

Techno wrapped a wing around Wilbur's body and let out a low hiss. Twisting himself so he laid over Wilbur. Trying to cover his body as much as he could. Staring daggers into Philza.

Phil stared down at him, his lips crooked into a smile, "do you think you can carry your brother, mate?"

Maybe. But even if Techno couldn't, he wasn't going to let Philza take another member of his flock away from him. He fell for that trick once. Watching as the man spirited his crying baby brother away. He was going to steal Wilbur too.

A click escaped Techno. The noise was odd. Tickling his throat in a way he hadn't felt it before. Nearly making him cough. The noise was weak and soft. The first time he had ever made the sound.

He did it again. A series of clicks forcing its way out to tell the murderer that Techno was scary too. He wasn't fucking around this time.

"Oh," Philza's voice was soft and vulnerable. "Is that the first time you've done it?"

Philza was suddenly on his knees, and Techno clicked *louder and faster*, until it choked him. He coughed, the noise tickled his throat, but then Philza was closer. Leaning in with... *tears* in his eyes? What the fuck? Techno hesitated for a moment.

But then Philza's maniac grin gave him away.

Techno let out a furious snarl, swiping at him blindly. Wilbur was as still as the couch, unmoving as Techno finally *attacked*.

It did not end well.

Techno's wrist was caught immediately. Pulling him up and *off* of Wilbur. Techno let out a chilling screech. It made his own ears ring. His *flock*. *His flock!! No!*

Philza couldn't take Wilbur away. Not again. *No!* Techno thrashed, kicking out wildly. His wings flaring out and hitting Philza as hard as he could muster. Techno leg hit the side table, knocking the lamp over. The light went out with the sound of shattering glass.

Sharp talons wrapped around Techno's neck. "Shhh," Philza whispered too fucking close to Techno's ear. "I'll show you how it's done."

Techno inhaled sharply as the talons pressed tightly against his skin. Not breaking it but-

He choked. Alarms were fucking ringing in his ears. The sharp edge of the talons traced against his skin, and he was hyper aware of it. But it was nothing. *Nothing* compared to the moment when Philza's thumb dug into the side of his neck.

A sharp loud *click* right next to Techno's ear rattled in his head. His instincts kicked up into high gear. Throwing all logical thoughts.

Stop, it meant. And Techno did.

Techno let out a shrill noise, as his legs gave up completely. His wings flared out to stop his fall, but strong arms caught him before he could tumble to the ground.

With a cry, he blindly pushed at Philza. Trying to get him to go *away*.

Surprisingly, Philza let go. Techno skittered back until his back hit the chair. Breathing wildly. Trying to gulp in oxygen as his brain tried to right itself.

His head was screaming at him. Techno tucked his wings tight against his back and curled up into a little ball. His breath coming out in fast pants, making his head feel light and dizzy. No. No no *no*.

His vision tilted. It was dark. The shards of the lamp crunched under the gleaming sharp shoes as they shifted. Techno caught a glimpse of a tattoo of a heart with two dots black on the man's ankle before it was gone. Philza knelt down, ignoring the glass as his knees pressed into them.

Techno didn't meet his eyes. A knowing sensation that if Techno met his eyes that he would be even more vulnerable than he was now. Much like how a blanket could save a child from the monster under the bed. Techno didn't know how he knew it, but it was *true*. He cowered. Wanting to hide under his wings but instinctively they stayed pinned to Techno's back.

Techno froze instead, even though he trembled uncontrollably.

Don't look at Count Philza.

There was a low breathy croon, that if it came from his brothers, Techno would have found it comforting. But instead it was coming from a *monster*.

Techno flinched back instead. Pushing himself closer to the chair pressed into his back. A soft scared chirp escaping him. From the corner of his eye, he saw Philza press closer. His black wings dragging on the ground, the glass clicking as it was pulled along with the feathers.

"Shh," a hand came up and gently grasped Techno's wrist, pulling his arm from where he was curling it against his chest. A soft croon again, too raspy, too deep, and Techno hiccupped.

He was crying. It had started while the world was too scary and fast. Shivers going up his spine from the talons brushing against his skin. Techno couldn't resist as he was pulled forwards. Into the wall of iron and feathers, the scent thick as Philza pressed Techno against his chest.

Techno chirped and hiccupped again.

"It's okay," Philza crooned, "shh, it's okay. I'm not mad. I knew one of you would do this. It's natural. One of you would test boundaries. I'm not angry. You did so well, Techno." Arms wrapped around him. "It's okay. I have you."

Something eased in Techno's chest. Knowing that Philza wasn't mad. It loosened a tight wound muscle. Tears still spilled out of his eyes. The arms around him squeezed Techno tightly, and he could hear Philza's steady heartbeat.

He had one. Of course he would. But it was still surprising to hear it.

Feathers shifted and glass slid on the ground as Philza stood up. He pulled Techno up with him. Techno's legs felt shaky as he stood on them. Philza didn't let go. Else Techno might have fallen back down onto the ground.

It wasn't just his legs that felt weak. His whole body shook.

Techno swayed, and the grip on his arm tightened. Keeping him upright. And then it pulled him. Close until he was leaning against Philza. A hand wrapped around Techno's neck, talons not prickling the skin, but the sharp point threateningly there.

"My little boy," Philza spoke softly, the words overwhelmingly fond. "My nestling." His palm was hot against Techno's neck.

Revulsion churned in Techno's stomach. His anger vanished, replaced by terror. It was the one emotion Techno clung to the past few days. But now it was gone. And the sick feeling returned. Alongside total helplessness.

Wilbur was still. His chest moving softly up and down. His face relaxed in sleep. Tommy was missing.

It was just him now. Techno against a murderer.

He couldn't do anything about it.

Philza pulled Techno away, just far enough for him to peer down at Techno. A lazy grin on his face. Tilting his head to the side.

Techno averted his eyes. A shiver running up his spine.

"There you go, sweetheart." Philza let out a pleased croon. A talon running against Techno's skin. "I'm in charge. And now you know it."

If those words were spoken an hour prior, Techno would have felt rage. But now he could only feel uneasy. His feathers puffing up at the sensation.

"Now, Techno. Do you think your actions followed the rules I set in place?" The words sent Techno's stomach dropping.

Tommy.

Please no. They tried to be so good. Followed all of the stupid rules. Just so they can see Tommy again. There wasn't a rule against attacking Philza but it almost certainly broke their agreement. More tears welled up in Techno's eyes, dread already seeping in. How long will they have to wait to see their flock again? How long will Philza keep Tommy away? He ruined it all.

Philza let out a little sigh and pulled Techno into a hug. The scent of iron and feathers invaded Techno's nose again. The food in his stomach churned. Phil leaned down to murmur in Techno's ear, "it'll be okay, Techno. How about we make a deal instead, hm? Instead of keeping Tommy away for longer, you can have a different punishment."

Techno didn't care if he had to scrub the bathroom floor with a toothbrush, anything would be better than keeping Tommy away. He sniffed, and nodded against Philza.

"Yes?" Philza confirmed, and Techno jerked his head up and down again. "Good," he proudly crooned. "Here is what is going to happen. I am going to pick your brother up-"

Techno flinched back. Wings jerking up as if he could shield Wilbur from Philza. But the arms around him tightened, keeping him in place. He let out a soft terrified warble.

"Shhh, I know. It's scary." Philza hummed, a talon coming up to curl around one of Techno's locks of hair. "I am going to pick Wilbur up and I will take him to your nest. I won't take him away. I know how much it hurts when your flock is gone."

Techno didn't believe him. He didn't believe his words. Not when Philza's actions had already stolen his brother away from him. The second Philza grabbed Wilbur it would be for forever. And Techno would be alone with the monster.

"Are you going to be good and accept your punishment, Techno?" Philza asked quietly. And for a moment, Techno paused. Then wilted, nodding again. "Good." Philza purred, "you are going to stay right where I put you, understood?"

Reluctantly, Techno nodded. And then those hands were guiding him. Pulling his stumbling feet and weak legs to the side and closer. There was a rustle of feathers, and half of the room vanished under a wall of quills.

Techno was pressed firmly against Philza's side, wing stretched over him. Like he was a *nestling*. A baby chick who needed to be under his mother's wing. It had been years since he had been under a wing that wasn't his brother's.

He froze.

Then Philza moved, taking a step. The black feathers pressed into Techno, and he was forced to follow. Like he was a *child* who kept running away from his parents.

Shame crawled up Techno's throat. Heat rising up. He ducked his head low, pink hair falling in his face to hide the blush that worked its way up. A mantra began to chant in his head. It was this or Tommy. This or Tommy. This or Tommy.

Techno would prefer the toothbrush cleaning.

The room was dark, and it became pitch black under the wings. It was just Techno, pressed up against Philza's side. The world shrank down. The only working light was laying on the ground in shards.

And yet, Philza moved easily in the darkness. His feathers pushing and pressing Techno to shift with him, keeping him close. Gliding across the room back to the slumbering figure on the couch. To Wilbur.

Techno kept the fear-filled warble down, hiding it behind his thudding heartbeat that lurched when Philza leaned down and scooped Wilbur up like he was a toddler. His older brother didn't stir, limp in the monster's hands. Philza didn't even seem phased by Wilbur's weight either. Pressing Wilbur tight to his chest, like he had with Tommy.

Wilbur's hand slipped down to hang in the air. Techno lurched forwards and caught it. Squeezing it tight.

Wilbur didn't squeeze back.

Techno couldn't stop the warble this time.

He won't let go. If Philza took Wilbur away, Techno will never let go. Even if Philza clicked at him again, Techno refused. He couldn't lose his flock. Not again. He couldn't stomach being alone. The thought made the terror notch higher, and he trembled more.

"Shhh, we are just going to your nest. You can hold onto Wilbur's hand, Techno. But you will stay right next to me. Okay?" Philza's words were soft but Techno knew there was a threat in there. A hidden blade ready to slice skin open.

Just like that man's throat.

Philza did not wait for Techno's answer. Instead moving quietly to the door. His shoes didn't make a sound on the ground. Gliding across the wood without a whisper. His feathers rustled occasionally. But that was the only noise.

Techno felt a chill race down his back. It wasn't exactly a surprise. Since the man always appeared and shocked them by lurking in the shadows. But it was another thing to witness it in person.

Techno kept pace. He could tell Philza was shortening his long stride to allow him to keep up. Feathers brushing against Techno's face and arms. Wilbur's lax hand in his, warm and dry. Nothing like Techno's sweaty palms.

It took a minute for Techno to realize that they were not moving as fast as he thought they were. It was dark, and the hallways were unfamiliar in the shadows. The library wasn't all that far from their room, and yet it was taking longer to get there. They should've been at their nest ages ago.

Techno's feet froze and the pit in his stomach grew. They weren't going to their nest. Philza was taking Wilbur away.

Feathers pressed at him, urging him to keep moving. But he couldn't help but clench Wilbur's hands tight, his knuckles going white. Terror ate him up. They were doomed. They were going to die. They were going to all die. There was nothing Techno could do.

The large wing nudged at him again, and Techno stumbled forwards. Instincts keeping him moving. Memories, distant as they were, of his mother keeping him under her wing. Before she deemed him old enough to wander freely. Those echoes kept Techno trudging to his demise.

It wasn't fair. It just wasn't *fair*. The rug had been ripped from underneath their feet, their lives uprooted and torn to pieces, and yet, they were about to get murdered. They were trying to just gather up what little pieces of themselves remained, and now it was going to be gone. Philza killed. And soon, it will be the three of them on the chopping block.

Techno felt hot fresh tears burn his eyes. His hand hurt. From clenching Wilbur's lax palm. The bones in his hand grinding painfully together from how tightly he grasped his flock.

And then, the wings shifted. Feathers sliding around him. Pulling back. Just for Techno to see a familiar door, slightly ajar.

Their nest.

Techno suddenly felt flatfooted. He had been certain they were being herded to the wrong place.

Philza pulled his wings back, releasing Techno from his grasp. But kept moving forwards, and Techno hung onto Wilbur. With a few steps, he was laying Wilbur in the middle of their nest. Blankets strewn everywhere. It wasn't made, like Wilbur liked to do in the mornings after they woke up. It hadn't been cleaned up since Tommy was snatched.

Then Philza stepped back.

Techno braced himself. Waiting for the other shoe to drop. Tentatively, ever so shakily, raising one of his wings to try and cover Wilbur.

Philza let out a soft coo, his blue eyes staring. Almost unblinking. A smile on his lips.

"Sleep well, Techno. Else, we will have a talk tomorrow." Philza spoke, finally, and he turned. Stepping out of the room. Closing the door with a quiet snick of the latch.

Techno didn't move for a few seconds. Convinced it was a trap. But when the door didn't slam open and Philza hissing and spitting at him, Techno threw himself over Wilbur. Sobs falling freely from his lips as he ran his hands up and down Wilbur, just to make sure he wasn't hurt. He was here. Really here. In their nest. The nearly vanished smell of Tommy on the blankets.

Frantically, Techno pulled the fabric of their nest up. Rearranging it. Shoring up the walls as if they could keep the Count out. Making it safe. Rearranging the pillows around until it surrounded them as tall as he could make it. Hiding them from the dangers out there.

Finally, when it was done, Techno crumbled.

"Wilbur," Techno whispered, voice hoarse and tight. Curling around Wilbur's slumbering body. "We can't stay here. We need to get out of here. All of us."

Wilbur didn't respond.

But faintly, ever so slightly, his hand squeezed Techno's. It was all the reassurance Techno needed.

Chapter End Notes

techno: [ready to throw hands]

philza: clicks ominously

techno: you wouldn't hurt a little boy like me, would you? a little birthday lad? I tremble and tear up and I am just a little kid.

special thanks to my bitch, thesaurus.com, for all the m words. really appreciated how I can abuse it to find all the words I needed for the bit.

we have one more chapter of "the bad beginning" arc.

End Notes

Kids: wow, surely nothing else can go wrong.

Phil: hooty hoo hello children

Kids: :fear:

Follow me on my [twitter](#) for updates or snippets of future chapters. I also announce when I am updating on there.

My friend, Bitsinboots, author of Secret of Being Colorful and I have made a discord (MULTIFANDOM NOW as of April 2024) server together. It is a 15+ age server. And it's a dictatorship. But if you'd like to come hang out with us, feel free. Here is the [discord link](#).

The more serotonin from your comments I get, the faster I will upload.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!